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·THE·HISTORY·OF· ·REYNARD·THE·FOX·

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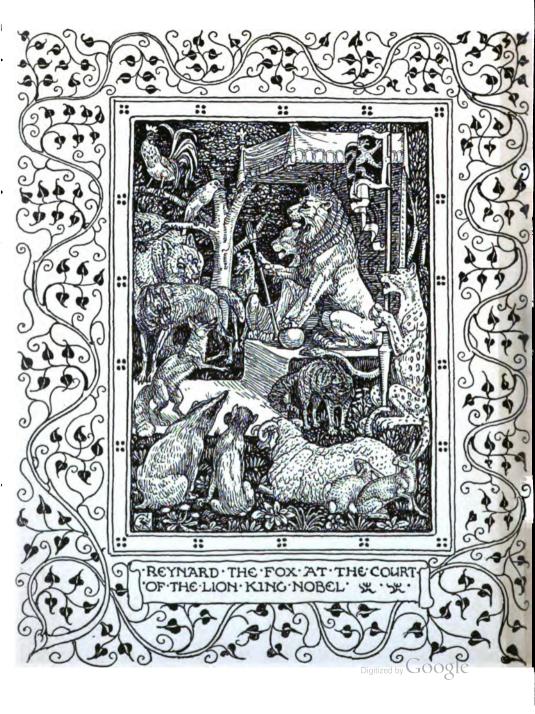


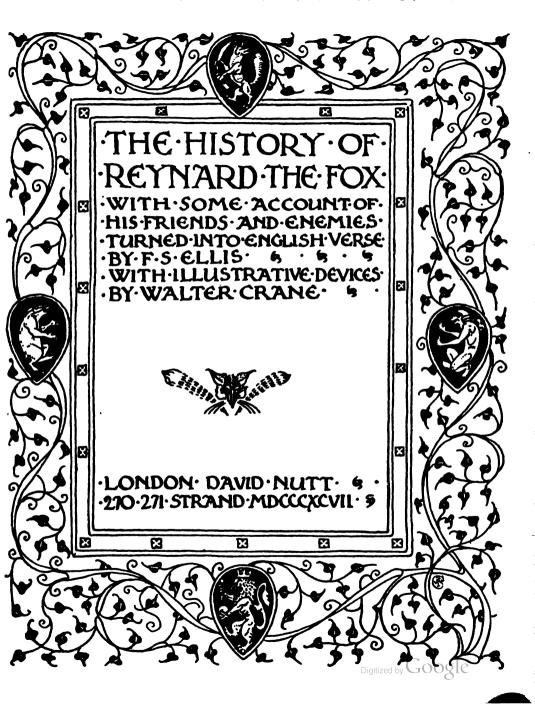
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THE · HISTORY · OF · REYNARD · THE FOX · HIS · FRIENDS · AND · HIS ENEMIES. HIS · CRIMES · HAIR-BREADTH · ESCAPES · AND · FINAL TRIUMPH. A · METRICAL · VERSION OF · THE · OLD · ENGLISH · TRANSLATION · WITH · GLOSSARIAL · NOTES IN · VERSE · BY · F · S · ELLIS · WITH DEVICES · BY · WALTER · CRANE

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CONCERNING THE STORY OF REYNARD THE FOX.

SINCE the author printed his version of "Reynard the Fox" in 1894, he has so often been asked, "What is the origin of the story?" that he determined whenever the book was re-written it should be accompanied by a full and complete dissertation on the literary history of Reynard, and thereto evoked the aid of one of the chief authorities on the subject. But when the account came to be fully set out, which should trace Reynard back to the beginning of his literary life, verily the story appeared to have as many obscure corners, twistings and turnings, complications, intricacies, and doubtful passages, as were to be found in his own stronghold of Malperdy, whereof we shall hear anon.

It has therefore been deemed advisable to put no more introduction to a book, the prime object of which is the amusement of the reader, than may be readily apprehended, and as lightly digested as were Reynard's two pigeons in chapter twenty-eight.

Suffice it to say here that scholars who have made a special study of the subject are agreed as to the extreme antiquity of stories and apologues concerning the subtlety and wiliness of the Fox, an antiquity, greater perhaps than

that of literature itself.

That the origin of the story is Indo-European seems to be allowed on all hands, but whether France or Germany can lay the better claim to the building up of the legends in Europe is still a moot point.

The history of the text upon which the present version is founded, is shortly this: About the year 1250 an author vii

named Willem put together the story in Flemish verse from the various legends and tales then current. A little more than a hundred years later, about 1375, it was re-written, and a second part or sequel added, by an author whose name is unknown. This was subsequently turned into Dutch prose, and ultimately printed at Gouda in Holland by Gerard Leeu in 1479. Scholars have decided that Caxton did not make use of this edition for his translation, but of some manuscript or printed version which is no longer extant. The variations, however, between Caxton's original and the Gouda edition of 1479 are of no great moment. Upon the edition printed by Caxton in 1481 and worthily reproduced at the Kelmscott Press in 1892 the present version is founded.

Those who desire to study the subject in all its fullness and detail, must be content to await the learned treatise on the literary genesis and evolution of Reynard promised by Professor Logeman by way of introduction to his projected critical edition of Caxton's translation.

The author is desirous that the version now printed should be considered as altogether superseding that which he published in 1894.

THE MATTERS RELATED IN THE SEVERAL CHAPTERS.

СНАР.	Proem	PAGE I	
I.	How the Lion, King Nobel, sent out his mandement that all beasts should come to his Court	3	The King holds court.
11.	The first complaint, made by Isegrym the Wolf against Reynard	4	The Wolf complains.
III.	The complaint of Courtoys the Hound	5	Courtoys' ill
IV.	How Grymbert the Dachs, Reynard's sister's son, spake up for him	7	The Dachs explains.
V.	How Chanticlere complained on Reynard	11	The Cock laments.
VI.	How the King spake touching this complaint	16	The King's good word.
VII.	How Bruin the Bear was sped of Reynard the Fox	18	The Bear's intents.
VIII.	How Bruin ate the honey	22	The Bear's reward.
IX.	The complaint of the Bear upon the Fox	35	The Bear's ill tale.
X.	How the King sent Tybert the Cat to the Fox, and how he sped therein	36	Tybert's hard days.
XI.	How Grymbert the Dachs spake yet once again for Reynard	· .	Dachs' redes
XII.	How Reynard was shriven of his sins on his way to the Court	50	Reynard shrift prays.
XIII.	How the Fox came to the Court, and how he excused him before the King	_	Reynard at Court.

	CHAP.		PAGE
Reynard's arrest.	XIV.	How the Fox was arrested and judged to death	62
Fox days seem short.	XV.	How the Fox was led to the gallows	64
Old sins confessed.	XVI.	How Reynard made his confession openly before the King, and all those who would hear it	68
The Fox well goes.	XVII.	How the Fox cozened the King, persuading him that the Wolf and the Bear were his foes, and how he gat grace of the King	74
The Wolf's dread care.	XVIII.	How the Fox gave his thanks to the King, and told of the hiding-place of a great treasure.	89
The Wolf's lost shoes.	XIX.	How the Wolf and the Bear were arrested by the labour of Reynard	100
Reynard's far fare.	XX.	How Isegrym and Ersewyn must suffer their shoes to be plucked off, and how they were done on to Reynard	103
Cuwaert's sad fate.	XXI.	How Cuwaert the Hare was slain by the Fox	111
Bellyn runs post.	XXII.	How the Fox sent the head of Cuwaert the Hare to the King, by the hands of Bellyn the Ram	119
The Ram's checkmate.	XXIII.	How Bellyn and all his lineage were given into the hands of Isegrym and Bruin, and how he was slain.	125
Joy rules the host.	XXIV.	How the King held high feast, and how Lapreel the Coney complained unto the King of Reynard the Fox	127
The Rook's great woe.	XXV.	How Corbant the Rook complained on the Fox for the death of Sharpbecke his wife	130
King Nobel raves.	XXVI.	How the King was wrathful at these complaints	132
Grymbert's fears grow.	XXVII.	How Grymbert the Dachs warned Reynard that the King was wroth with him, and would slay him	138
The Fox all braves.	XXVIII.	How Reynard came another time to the Court	142
The Fox speaks fair.	XXIX.	How the Fox excused him before the King, and how the King answered upon Reynard's excuse	159
Dame Ruke- nawe's rede.	XXX.	How Dame Rukenawe answered for the Fox to the King	
Strange ser- pent snare.	XXXI.	A parable of a man that delivered a serpent from peril of death	

CHAP.				AGE	
XXXII. Of the friend	ls and kin of Re	nard the Fox		190	The droll Fox breed.
	ox with subtlety Cuwaert the H at were laid again	are, and of	all other		Reynard's romance.
	•			•	
XXXIV. How Isegry	n the Wolf comp	olained again o	n the Fox		The Wolf new cries.
XXXV. A fair parab	e of the Fox and	the Wolf .		235	The Ape's pleasance.
XXXVI. How Isegry: with him.	•	love to the Fo	x to fight	243	The Wolf defies.
XXXVII. How the Fo	x took up the g			245	The Fox must fight.
XXXVIII. How Dame Fox of the against th	Rukenawe the se way he should be Wolf	She-Ape couns behave him in	the field	246	Dame Rukenawe's shield.
XXXIX. How the Fo		field		250	The Fox well dight.
XL. How the W	olf and the Fox	ought together	r	252	Fought is the field.
XLI. How the Fo that he ca	x, being under t me above again		lozed him	256	The Fox nigh lost.
XLII. How Isegry the Fox h	m was overcom ad the worship	e by the Fox,	and how	263	Reynard victorious.
XLIII. An ensample had won		old to the King		267	Gain at sore cost.
XLIV. How the I sovereign	King forgave th and greatest over	e Fox and ner all his lands	nade him	270	Reynard's state glorious.
	m the King an	d went to his			He lives in scorn of
Malperdy	• • •			273	folk cen-
Epilogue		• •		276	sorious.
GLOSSARIAL NOTES				279	
INDEX-SUMMARY OF	CHIRE MATTER	S CONTAINED	IN THE	. ,	
cmont!	Chief Mailes			285	



IDDEN within this story men may find Good learning, parables, and points diverse, Which every man should mark who hath a mind To master subtle knowledge (and the curse O'ercome, which mankind mostly doth immerse In ignorance and blindness), taught such things As wise men utter in the courts of Kings

Or lordly prelates when they council hold, Or where grave merchants meet to sift their cares, Or common folk foregathering on the wold To plain the hard dull lot of him who wears His life in servitude and hardly fares From birth till death's release. Good help and meed This book shall give to all who rightly read:

For he who readeth it, or lists it read, May gather witting of the base deceit Wherewith the world doth cozen goodlihead; Not with the purpose cozenage to repeat Against his fellows, but such things to weet As serve for safeguard against wily shrews, Eschewing warily the arts they use.

And he who will good understanding gain Of all this matter, earnestly and well, With humble heart must con this book, and fain

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Proem.

Shall he then grow past power of words to tell, Hoping for Heaven, and fearing nought of Hell. But one short reading no man will suffice To gather up fair wisdom's pearls of price,

Which, sought with pains, will yield a rich reward To those who treasure them with care and love. And many a gold-worth lesson will afford This tale to him who through life's storms would move

With calm content, ah! surely shall he prove Sweetness untold, despite the world's annoy, And passing hence find heaven's unending joy.



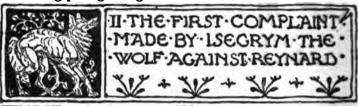


HOW THE LION KING NOBEL SENT OUTHLS MANDEMENT THAT ALL BEASTS SHOULD COME TO HIS COURT SAY

WAS near the days of Pentecost, When woods grow green, and Winter's frost Is clean forgot: when fragrant flowers Bedeck the meadows, brakes, and bowers. Yet once again, and every tree Resounds with gladsome harmony Of joyous birds, who sweetly sing Welcome to springtide's burgeoning, That Nobel, Lion-King, and Lord O'er every beast that treads the sward, Made known his will to hold High Court While dured the Feast, and bade resort Thither, all those who humbly bowed Beneath his sceptre; straight a crowd Of lieges gathered, great and small, To keep the glorious festival Proclaimed by heralds; nor was one Absent therefrom, except alone The Fox, within whose bosom grew Alarm for crimes whereof he knew His hands right guilty. Small desire He therefore had to face the ire Of those who justly might complain His theft and trespass, but full fain Was he to hide his head; and when The King of Beasts appeared in ken Of all his subjects, quickly rose A storm of wrath from Reynard's foes

I. The King holds Court.

While each from out his breast unlocks Some long-pent grief against the Fox.



IRST spoke the grey wolf Isegrym, Whose eager eve and quivering limb Betraved his wrath: loud cried he: "Friends. Before this Court I claim amends Against the Fox, for crimes so great (Devised and done with spiteful hate Toward me and mine), that, when I speak Thereof, all words sound vain and weak. Give ear, most just and noble lord, Whilst I with aching heart record How Reynard hath destroyed my life: For not alone my well-loved wife Hath he insulted, but with mind To mar my lineage, sought to blind My three dear children as they lay In bed.

Forthwith was set a day,
When Reynard forth should come and swear,
By holy saints, that he had ne'er
Thereof been guilty, but when brought
Forth was the sacred book, he thought
Him otherwise, and straightway stole
Back to his thievish lurking hole,
Crying that naught he set thereby.
Dear King, all this is openly
Beknown to many a beast who stands
Before thee here: Nay, more! his hands

II. The Wolf complains.

Are stained by evil deeds, which blot
His life in such wise, that I wot
No man exists whose tongue could tell
All that I leave untold: so fell
The trespass is that he hath done
Against my wife, that while the sun
Doth light the heavens no power shall save
The Fox from that revenge I crave."



S ceased the Wolf, a hush profound Fell o'er the Court, when lo! a hound, Courtoys to wit, stood forth, and spake. "I, too," quoth he: "complaint would make Of Reynard Fox, who all the store, Laid up against the winter frore, Stole from my garner, so that I Of hunger's pangs scarce failed to die Through his most base misdeed."

Hereat.

Sprang sharply forward Tybert Cat,
Whose swelling tail bespoke his ire,
While flashed his grey-green eyes with fire,
As cried he: "Gracious Lord and King,
Tis doubtless true that men may bring,
With justice, many a charge of crime
Against the Fox, but ill doth chime
This plaint of Courtoys in mine ears;
Tis but a tale of long past years,
And I, not he, have right to make

III. Courtoys' Complaint thereof; the hound did take ill sort. From me that sausage which by night I from the Miller won, despite His watchful care, while sound he slept. Courtoys in claiming it, outstept

The bounds of truth;—except through me

He had therein no property.

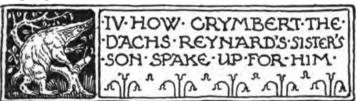
"THOUGH Courtovs be to blame for this." Exclaimed the Panther, "strange it is That thou, O Tybert, shouldst appear To shelter Reynard, when 'tis clear, Past doubt or question, he hath been A thief and murderer; well I ween That in this world no man doth live To whom he would in kindness give The meanest gift: nay, though the King Had direst need, no single thing This thief would do to help or save His life or worship; but the grave Might o'er him close, without a sigh From Reynard, could he win thereby Some base advantage. List ye now The tale of Cuwaert Hare: a vow Did Reynard make that he would teach The guileless creature how to preach And say his *Credo*, so that he Might one day fill a chaplaincy. Betwixt his legs he made him sit, And *Credo*, *Credo* cry: as it Rose through the air I passed along, And wondering much to hear that song, Drew near the spot, and scarce need say That once again his wonted play The Fox enacted; soon he ceased His task to teach the simple beast

III. Courtoys' ill sort.

How he should sing his *Credo* note, And grasped him tightly by the throat. Most haply, in the nick of time I came to save him, or the crime Had been fulfilled—behold! still fresh, The wound that scores his tender flesh.

"Great King it is for thee to stretch The hand of justice o'er this wretch, Lest you, and all your royal race, In shielding crime, should share disgrace."

"Ye speak, Sir Panther, wholesome truth," Cried Isegrym, "it were, forsooth, Idle to waste more words, this night I fain would see the gallows dight For Reynard, that his crimes surcease Might give the world new rest, and peace."



PROSE in haste then Grymbert Dachs, Exclaiming: "Sorely doth it tax Temper and patience thus to hear Foul charges made against my dear Good Uncle Reynard: dost thou deem That thou may'st slander thus mine Eme, O Isegrym, while silent I, His loving kinsman, stand anigh And nought reprove? That saw doth tell Good truth, which saith: 'But rarely well Speaketh a foeman's mouth'; right glad

Were I if trial could be had Betwixt ye twain: then should we see Which best deserved upon a tree To end his days. Stood Reynard near Our gracious Lord, and had his ear As thou hast had, then doubt I not The case were changed, for well I wot, Thy crimes made known, dismay would seize Thy dastard heart, and on thy knees Thou straight wouldst fall, and 'mercy' cry, Convict of lies, and treachery. How oft your sharp, white, grinning teeth With cruel grip have met beneath My dearest Uncle's russet fell, A busy tongue 'twould need to tell. But of more crimes than this I trow. **Justice demands the Court should know** The legend: did ye not misdo When Reynard flung the plaice to you From out the cart? Didst thou not eat His share, thou base-born hungry cheat, Leaving but prickly bone and gristle, Dry, hard, and tasteless as a thistle? Recall to mind that bacon flitch My Uncle stole, and ye so rich And dainty found, that all alone You gulped it down, nor left one bone To stay his hunger. Was it fair That, when he claimed a modest share, Ye laughing cried, with mocking scorn: 'Nay, Reynard! look not so forlorn, But if thou wilt, come take thy part From out my gullet;' and did dart Therewith an angry murderous scowl, Set off with such a threatening growl, As well might scare him? And I deem

No scrap of that fair flitch my Eme E'er tasted, though at risk of life He gat it, when the farmer's wife A sack threw o'er him. Can ye trust One who hast proved himself unjust, Treacherous, and selfish past belief; A rogue ingrained; a common thief? What trash this fable of the strife In days long past, about his wife! Reynard paid court to her, while she Received his love with courtesy; And Isegrym in truth were wise, Such foolish scandal to despise, Instead of scattering far and wide A slanderous tale that well might bide Forgotten. Then of Cuwaert Hare, Good Heavens I to think how great a scare Is raised, because an idle scholar Was gently shaken by the collar! Shall truants rest then, unreclaimed, Their faults excused, their masters blamed?

Courtoys has dared to make complaint, (As though he were himself a saint)
That he some winter store hath lost,
Laid up with special care and cost.
Well had he done thereof to hold
His peace, for, let the truth be told,
He did but steal it—thus, pardee,
Male quesisti et male
Perdidisti, in English done:
'Thou ill hast lost what ill was won'—
Who blameth Reynard, for this deft
And fair reprisal, made on theft?
His action simply was to levy
Distraint in manner of replevy;

A righteous deed. All those who know The law, right readily will trow My dearest Eme (as man of worth, Untainted honour, and high birth) Scorned stolen goods, nor had misdone To slay Courtoys outright—for none Thereof could blame him—but he knew Too well what high respect is due To legal form, and left the hound Unscathed, who well were hanged or drowned. Alas! What thanks, then, hath he gained? Nay, none; yet nobly hath disdained To answer slander, for a true And gentle heart is his. But few Hate falsehood like to him. He lives A saintly hermit life, and gives Heed to his priest's advice. No more He hunts and fishes as of yore, Nor taketh food but once a day, Vowing henceforth to put away From off his table all flesh meat. With strictest penance doth he treat His chastened body, and doth wear Against his flesh a shirt of hair. But yesterday I heard it said. By some who know him well, that dead He is to earthly joys. He builds, as anchorite to dwell, Where once stood Castle Malperdy. For winning gold no longer he Hath lust, but cheerfully doth live On such poor alms as men may give To serve bare needs. He pale doth wax With fast and prayer, which sorely tax His strength, and humbly 'neath the sod Desires to rest, at peace with God."

As Grymbert boldly spake these words, Broke on their view a troop of birds, A-wending towards them down the hill; Chanticlere leads, while loud and shrill Their wail of woe resounds; a bier Is seen—as slowly draw they near The wondering Court—on which lies dead A hen of fairest plume, whose head The Fox hath bitten off. They sing Sad funeral dirges, while they bring Before the Court their deep distress, And Reynard's untold gracelessness.



THEN forth stood Chanticlere, and smote Sadly his wings, the while his throat Gave out a loud and piteous cry. Beside the bier stood mournfully, Two fair young hens, the sisters twain Of her by ruthless Reynard slain, This Crayant, and that Cantart, hight. Each bare in hand a taper bright, No finer hens. Of whitest wax. Between fair Flanders and Ardennes, E'er scratched or cackled. "Welaway!" They cried, and "Ah! woe worth the day!" Two plump-fed pullets bore the bier. Who so bemoaned their mother dear That far and wide their grief was heard: And thus the sorrowful train appeared

V. The Cock Before the King.

Then Chanticlere
Exclaimed: "Great Lord, we pray thee hear
What scathe thy loving friends, who stand
Before thee, suffer at the hand
Of Reynard Fox:

In April last, When spring o'er earth began to cast Her robe of green, I proudly walked Abroad, and with my children talked, Boasting the long drawn lineage we Could claim, and praised our ancestry. My noble brood I deemed unmatched. For never finer birds were hatched Than my fifteen: dear daughters seven. As bright and fair as though from Heaven They claimed descent, and eight stout sons, Of blood as true as that which runs In royal veins. We safely dwelt Within a well-walled yard, and felt Secure, unharassed by a doubt Of prowling beasts of prey. Without Our high-walled yard there stood a shed Wherein six stalwart dogs were fed, Whose deep mouthed baying gave alarm, And thus, exempt from fear of harm, We lived content. Hereat so great The Fox's envy grew, and hate So deep and deadly filled his mind, That day and night he strove to find Some means whereby to scale the yard; And though our vigilance debarred His schemes awhile, his soul became At last quite mad, and all aflame With hot desire; but if anigh He came our trusty dogs would fly

So fiercely at him, that sweat broke From out his fell as thick as smoke.

V. The Cock laments.

"No stomach had he more to climb Our wall, and quit were we long time Of Reynard's face, till clad in weed Of hermit coming: 'Prithee, read,' Quoth he, 'for love and charity, This letter,' and displayed to me A scroll, which bore your royal crest And coat of arms in wax impressed. Therein 'twas written that the King Most earnestly desired to bring All birds and beasts, throughout the realm, Of which 'tis his to guide the helm, In sweet accord and loving peace. It bade all strife forthwith to cease. And said: 'let none henceforth scathe other But dwell as brother should with brother.'

The Fox declared that he no more In riot lived, as heretofore, Nor e'er again would rob and roister, But hermit-like, within a cloister, Would penance do for past misdeeds, With sighs and tears, and tell his beads Morn, noon, and night, for now he meant To pass as humble penitent His few remaining years. His gown, Made pilgrim fashion, fell adown Below his ankles, and he ware Beneath his robe, a shirt of hair, Rough, hard, and knotted. 'Now,' quoth he 'No more ye need have fear of me, Sir Chanticlere; plain haws and hips Alone henceforth shall pass my lips, Varied, on feasts, by barley bread.

laments.

V. The Cock Already do I feel the thread Of life is worn, and near the goal My steps approach, therefore my soul I needs must think on, and but long To say sext, none, and evensong, And compline, lauds, and tierce, and prime, Day in, day out, and thus my time In pious works and prayers to spend, With hope to make a blessed end.'

> "As thus he spake—and 'neath a thorn Lay down to rest—no child new-born Could seem more guileless. Then a book From out his vest he drew, with look So grave and studious, that I thought The way of holy life he sought Within its pages. Therefore, gay And blithe of heart, I went my way, And crowing, strolled without the wall In careless ease. My cheerful call Brought sons and daughters round in haste, And forth we strutted o'er the waste By fear unchecked.

List now the hate Of this false saint, and how, to sate His ravening maw, he broke the truce Thy law proclaimed. On some excuse He came abroad, and as we stept Across the green sward, slyly crept Behind a bush, and quickly snapped One of my children, which he clapped Within his wallet, and since then For cockerel, pullet, chick, or hen, He hourly watches; horns and hounds He scorns in suchwise, that no bounds His ravin knows. Erewhile, fifteen

V. The Cock

Fair children knew me, now are seen
To answer to my call, but four.
Well may'st thou judge, great King, what sore,
Keen sorrow racks my breast—see here
My daughter Coppen on her bier,
By Reynard slain but yesterday.
For burial was she snatched away
From out his clutches by our friends,
The guardian dogs. Dear Lord, here ends
My piteous tale; I leave to thee
The Fox's doom and penalty."





TOUCHING CHANTICLERES

BURST forth the King—whose wrath did wax Exceeding hot—"Sir Grymbert Dachs, What say ye now to this recluse, Your sainted Eme? A paltry ruse Appears this tale of fast and prayer, But hither shall the culprit fare, Ere twice the sun sinks 'neath the sea, To answer for his crime. Thy plea, Good Chanticlere, is witness strong Against the Fox, and thou ere long Shalt be avenged. The Church's rites Shall honour Coppen, and with lights And incense, shall be sadly sung Her vigil, while with pomp among Her kin, shall she be laid to earth."

Then hushed was every sound of mirth, While all in sad procession go, Singing Placeho Domino, With psalms, and versicles, and prayers, Thereto belonging. Pious cares Of vigil done, and commendation Said o'er, with funeral oration, The corse within the pit was laid. Above, a noble tomb was made Of purest marble, spotless white, Than glass more clear, than pearl more bright, And, deeply cut in during stone,

Her name and fate these words made known:

VI. The King's good word.

"Beneath the earth deep dolven, here Lies Coppen, child of Chanticlere: Reft of sweet life before her time Was she, by Reynard Fox's crime. Reader, not wasted were thy breath In one short sigh o'er her sad death."

THE King then summoned round him wise And learned men, who should advise How past all doubt these murders might Be proved against the Fox, and Right Once more hold sway throughout the land.

Ere long went forth the royal command, That Reynard must appear before The Court in person, and no more, For cause or quip, should he refrain From coming thither, under pain Of hangman's rope.

Then Bruin Bear Was charged that he with wisest care Should do the message.

Quoth the King:

"Sir Bruin, thine it is to bring
The culprit hither, be thou steeled,
Both ear and heart, against him: yield
No trust or credence to his smiles,
Sly, crafty speech, or flattering wiles:
For doubt thou not that he will try
On thee some scheme of treachery:
Long have I known him for a shrew,
Fairspoken, but of heart untrue."

QUOTH Bruin: "Good, my Lord, let be, 17

C

VI. The King's good word. Think you this thief deceiveth me? Or dost thou deem that I so ill Have learned my lesson, that the skill I lack to snare a Fox?"

So fared He forth with merry heart, prepared To brave the foe: assurance vain! Less joyous he returned amain.



VII · HOW · BRUIN · WAS · SPED · OF · REYNARD · THE · FOX ·

ORTH started Bruin on his way. Rejoicing, light of heart, and gay As bird in spring, and well assured That by no Fox could he be lured, To fault or folly, or could be O'ermatched in craft, and subtlety. The season was of opening June: The blackbird's note, the ringdove's croon, Sounded o'erhead, and far around Fair flowers bedecked each hedgerow mound, The hawthorn whitened every brake Wherefrom the winds sweet odour take. Ere pass they whispering through the sedge, Beside the brimming river's edge, Oft murmuring lovers' hopes and fears, As erst they told of Midas' ears. Hyacinth bells of purple deep, Awaked once more from winter sleep, And nature all, in wood and fell, For spring-tide's wake, kept festival. 18

Blind to the joys of waning spring,
And deaf to birds' sweet carolling,
Sped Bruin onward, till he stood
Within a thick-grown darksome wood,
Wherethrough a secret pathway went,
Which Reynard ofttimes took, when spent
With close pursuit, and close anigh,
A towering mountain rose, whose high
Steep side he needs must climb, to go
Towards Reynard's stronghold.

Ye must know

That many a dwelling had the Fox, But here, high up among the rocks, Was found the safest, and the best Of all his burrows: once at rest Within its well-built walls, he lay Secure and safe, when driven to bay.

Now, when the Bear at last had come, Before the Fox's mountain home. Malperdy hight, he found the gate Fast shut, so on his tail he sate, In front thereof, and loudly cried: "Ho! Reynard—be ye there inside Your castle wall? Browning am I, Sent by the King, to notify His strict command, that forthwith ye Appear at Court to make your plea. He stoutly by his God hath sworn, That should you this his summons scorn. And dare refuse with me to go, To bide his dooming, and to show Him full submission, it shall cost You life and good, for either tost High on the gallows shall ye be, Or on the rack die wretchedly.

Reynard, in time be wisely ruled By one who hath at Court been schooled In wit and wisdom: bow thine head Ere yet the hour of grace be sped."

Lay Reynard just inside the gate. Stretched forth at length. From tail to pate He sunned himself, with half shut eye, And dreamed of merry days gone by, When no one blamed his loselry. But when he heard the Bear begin This speech, at once he sought to win One of the cryptic spots, which he Had wrought in castle Malperdy. For this strong fortress, sooth to say, Had many a dark and hidden way, Narrow and crooked, short and long, Designed to make all those go wrong Who sought the Fox against his will: And, if some tracked his steps, he still Knew secret doors, where in and out, From hole to hole, he passed about With furtive steps, and stored his prey At night-time won, for feast by day.

THEN mused the Fox, how might he bring The Bear to grievous suffering And deep disgrace, the while he bode In worship, lightened of the load Of chastisement, his meed and due.

Having this worthy aim in view, He issued forth, and cried: "Dear Eme, Ye be right welcome! if it seem That when ye called I tarried long, Believe me well, 'twas evensong

Held my attention at the time. But surely he who made one climb O'er this long hill, of your high rank, From me shall win but slender thank. The road is steep, and hot, and dreary, And grieves my heart to see thee weary. O'erworn, and faint, while sore doth reek With dust and sweat, thy honoured cheek: All needless too was this, for I Had come to Court, spontaneously, The morrow morn. But less I grieve, Seeing that now shall I receive Thy comfort, counsel, and support, To help my plea before the Court: Yet seems it strange the King assigned To you this office; could he find No humbler messenger to send On such a duty? Well 'tis kenned Of all good men for true, that ye Rank next the King for family, Great wealth and lands. Ah! well I would That in the Court e'en now we stood. As friends and brothers, side by side, But find it needful to abide At home to-day, through having fared On such rich meat, that if I dared To walk abroad, 'twere little wonder, Though that my belly burst asunder: The meat was new, and I for once, O'erstepped the bounds of temperance. Exclaimed the Bear: "Dear Nephew, say— What luscious food did Heaven purvey To give you such delight?" "Dear Eme," The Fox replied, "Small help I deem, 'Twould be to thee, if I should tell The meat that sayoureth me so well.

It is forsooth but simple food,
That suits the simple tastes of rude,
Untutored country folk, who fain
Must be to fill themselves with plain
And homely viands: honeycombs
I made repast on—in the homes
Of poor and hungry men, such fare
Is counted good."

Cried out the Bear:

"Reynard! so little set ye by
Sweet honeycombs? For my part I
Esteem them foremost of all meat,
Fragrant and luscious, soft and sweet,
Past measure: help me to obtain
Good store thereof, and ye shall gain
My lasting friendship while I live:
Prove only that thy hand can give
Such food in plenteouswise to me,
And count me thine eternally."



OUOTH Reynard, seemingly agape, "Dear Uncle, surely ye but jape!" Cried Bruin, with an oath: "Nay, nay, My words are naught of game or play, But sober truth, no thing is this Whereof to jest or jape ywis."

Then spake red Reynard: "If it be Truth that ye love so heartily

Fair honeycombs, thou soon shalt hold A store of luscious, bee-wrought gold, In such great quantity that ten Or twelve grown bears might feast, and then A heap be left; heaven grant that I Your friendly help may win thereby."

"Nay! dearest Nephew," quoth the Bear, "Such plenty scarce can be, for were Before me all that is for sale From here to far off Portingale, I, Bruin, all alone would eat, In one great feast, that dainty meat."

Quoth Reynard: "Eme, ye scarcely know What thing ye say, for I will show Thine eyes a farmstead, where doth dwell Lantfert, a husbandman, whose well Of honey ne'er was known to fail; Nay, though ye drank it by the pail, 'Twould not give out for seven long years." (Hereat the Bear pricked up his ears.)

"Now all this honey without end, Shalt thou possess, if thou befriend My cause at Court, and grant to me Thine aid to foil each enemy."

A solemn oath then Bruin swore,
To be his nephew's friend before
All other men, if so he might
His belly fill, or day or night,
With fragrant bee-borne honey. Laughed
Thereat the shrew, with guileful craft,
And said, "Yea! soothly, would ye load
Seven Hambro' barrels with that sweet food,
Yet will I pledge me to obtain

23

VIII. The

Thy heart's desire, and make thee fain." Bear's reward. So well these words of Reynard pleased The Bear, that straightway was he seized With laughter, till he scarce could stand. Beside him sat the Fox with bland Deceitful smile, and thought: "Full soon, Friend Bruin, thou shalt laugh to tune."

> Then cried he: "Now no longer may This matter tarry, let's away: 'Tis meet I work for thy behoof, And put my friendship to the proof, Past doubt or question; thou shalt see That none can act more friendlily. Of all my lineage lives not one, Except thine own dear self alone. For whom I thus would slave and swink."

"Thanks! thanks!" the Bear cried, "but I think 'Tis time we sped—we tarry long."

"Dear Eme," quoth Reynard, "with a strong Quick pace step forward; follow me, Thou, ere one hour goes by, shalt see More honey than thou well canst bear."

The sly Fox bode the evil fare His foe should find, but that he meant A gibe, the Bear saw not, but went With willing steps toward Lantfert's yard.

Now this same Lantfert laboured hard At woodman's work, and many an oak And elm he felled with sturdy stroke, And drew them homewards, to abide

His craftsman's work in wintertide. Within the yard it happed there lay A forest king, brought yesterday From out the wood, wherein he drove Great wedges, which wide open clove The massive trunk. Hereof was glad The wily Fox, for thus he had A ready snare to hand. Quoth he, "Dear friend, behold this cloven tree Whose hollowed body doth contain Unmeasured honey, which to gain, You need but place your nose between This open space, and soon I ween Will have thy fill: but prithee eat In sparing wise of this choice meat, For though the honeycombs be good, It yet were well ye understood The need for prudence, lest ye take Some hurt of body. For my sake I prithee have a care, lest blame Fell on my head if evil came To thee, my friend and guest."

"Nay, nay!"

Cried Bruin, "haste to put away
Such thought, dear Reynard; dost thou ween
That I, sage Bruin, would be seen
To act a fool's part? moderation
Incumbent is on men of station."
Reynard replied: "Sound, wholesome truth
Thy speech betokeneth well forsooth:
Approach the tree's end now, and creep
Within the cleft."

With lumbering leap The Bear trod toward the oak in haste, O'erjoyed to think he soon should taste The longed-for good; his pointed nose VIII. The

Down thrust he, and his forefeet toes Bear's reward. Set well within the open space; Forthwith leapt Reynard toward the place With lightning speed, and deftly twitched The wedges forth:—as if bewitched, The oak sprang to, and held the Bear With iron grip.

> He well may spare To flatter, threaten, coax, or chide, Fast in the tree-trap must he bide, Imprisoned by the base deceit Of Reynard Fox; for head nor feet, No craft or might, can freedom gain. The foe, of Bruin's misery fain, With light foot, gained a branching tree And thence, clear-voiced, sang merrily:

"WHENE'ER you go a Fox to trap, Bruin! Bruin! Beware lest you by sad mishap Catch ruin! ruin! 'Twould seem the Fox has been your match, Bruin! Bruin! And set a new-found trap to catch You in! You in! No more wilt thou the Fox betray To ruin! ruin! Farewell, then, till another day, Dear Bruin! Bruin!"

The trapped, befooled, outwitted Bear, Rends the soft drowsy summer air With dismal howls. He strives to use His sturdy sinews and strong thews With such effect as might release His paws and head, nor doth he cease

To strike the ground with savage beat Of hinder paws, but both fore-feet, And head, and ears, are fixed as fast As though frore winter's fettering blast Held them ice-bound with iron hand. Finding force vain, he next with bland And friendly words essays to coax His wily foe. Quoth he: "A hoax, Dear Reynard, surely ye but play In merry sport; without delay Thrust in the wedge, and once more free, Such friendship will I show to thee, That next beside the King shalt thou Hold rule, and every beast shall bow To thy behest."

Loud Reynard laughed. Rejoiced to see his wiles and craft Had so far triumphed; then quoth he, In cruel jest, "It gladdens me That thou shouldst in that honey find A banquet suited to thy mind: But, prithee, Bruin, have a care, How ye enjoy that luscious fare, Lest while ye wallow in its wealth Delight should prove the bane of health, And sickness follow in such sort That thou shouldst be debarred from Court. If I mistake not, on the brink Of greater joys ye stand; some drink Thou surely needest, and I see Good Lantfert coming, doubtless he A cool draught brings to quench thy thirst; I trust that he will kindly first Use well the goodly oaken stick He bears to push well down the thick And clammy sweetness, which I fear

Gives thee misease. No longer here My goodwill towards thee bids me stay, But trust thou mayst a pleasant day With Lantfert spend."

Then cheerily He trotted off towards Malperdy.

When Lantfert, hard at work indoors,
Caught sound of Bruin's howls and roars,
With haste he seized a stout oak stick
Shod with an iron point, and quick
As lightning ran whence came the din.
Soon as he spied the Bear, "A gryn
Of newest kind," he cried, "is this
Wherein to catch a bear ywis!"
He first with all his might belabours
The helpless beast, and then his neighbours
From round about he runs to call,
With shouts that Bruin's heart appal,
Of, "Hi! run quick, I've caught a bear,
Speed! speed! good friends, the sport to share!"

THROUGHOUT the thorp the tidings rang Like tocsin call, and each man sprang To win some weapon; carls and wives Rushed forth, as though their very lives Hung on the race: Hal seized a stake From out the hedge, while Hob a rake Laid hurried hand on; Giles a broom Snatched up to help on Bruin's doom; The priest unto the winds did toss His book, and seized his long staff-cross, While quickly followed in his trail, The clerk, with heavy threshing flail. Distaff in hand, the priest's wife ran To watch the sport the while she span: Young girls, just turning life's first page,

And beldames, who in toothless age Spelt finis, all would join the fray, The Bear to bait, tease, maim, or slay: Against him now is each man's hand And, friendless, he the brunt must stand.

When Bruin heard the murderous shout That rose from all this rabble rout. With mighty wrestling did he strain Freedom of head and limbs to gain. His fore-feet freed with one great wrench From out the knotted oak's firm clench, He heeded little that his paws Were spoiled of those defensive claws That erst had armed them: then one more Wild, frantic effort, and he tore His head from out the cleft: alack! With loss of ears! started aback In panic fear the unhappy beast, When forthwith Lantfert and the priest Rushed on him, and from out the folk A fearful storm of blows thick broke O'er head and limbs, till death's dread fear Sickened his brain, as far and near Fresh foes come hasting, from whose eyes Gleam glances, murderous as their cries. Dickon the ploughman left his tillage And, shouting, ran adown the village, Coulter in hand: from forth his smithy Rushed Gervase, snatching from the stithy A red hot iron; Wat the baker Left loaves to burn; the deaf shoemaker, Seeing all run, threw down his last, And hurried forth, his apron cast Out on the road: with clumsy gait Hastes halting Hugelyn, while his mate,

Old Ludolf, long and broad of nose, Runs panting, lest the sport should close Ere he arrives; with reaping hook Long fingered Bertolt comes; a crook Tall Ottram brings, wherewith to smite The helpless victim; strange delight Find Batkyn and Ave Abelguack. And old dame Bave, becrooked of back, And every soul from out each cot— Young, old, hale, sick, it mattered not, Each time that they a blow can add. To wound the Bear and drive him mad. That fellow feeling held their mind Was clear, but surely wondrous kind It made them not, for never yell, More fearful, burst from fiends of hell, Than out the stormy crowd arose Of Bruin's fell bloodthirsting foes.

Once more the Priest led on the fray,
And with his staff-cross made dread play,
While from his heavy threshing flail,
The clerk rained blows like April hail;
Tall Ottram with his shepherd's crook
Seized the beleaguered beast, who quook
With mortal fear. While Bertolt fast,
Firmhanded, held him, Ludolf cast
A well-aimed spear, whose keen steel point
Found home beneath the shoulder joint.

The victim quivered, groaned, and sighed, But whatsoe'er of ill betide
Must needs endure. Of all his foes
Stout Lantfert fiercest proved, and rose
His voice o'er all the rout. Then sprang
His brother forth, and wildly flang
His staff athwart sad Bruin's eyes,

Blinding and maddening in such wise The wretched creature, that a rush At random made he through a bush That grew beside the stream; there stood A heap of wives, and in the flood He drave them toppling off the steep High bank, within the rolling deep. Foremost of all, the parson's wife Was seen to struggle for her life Within the gurgling tide, and when Her spouse espied her, quickly then He lost all lust to bait the Bear, And cried: "Friends! friends! behold ye where Within the stream my wife is thrown, And 'neath its wave is like to drown: O help her! save her! if ye may, And henceforth shall ye from this day Have full forgiveness, and release Of all your sins, and Heaven's sweet peace Bedew your souls." Ye well may wot That all the crowd at once forgot The hunting of the struggling beast, And sought alone to serve their priest.

WHEN Bruin saw that every wight
Forsook his baiting, and the plight
Alone regarded of the wives,
Who strove and struggled for their lives
Like drowning sheep, he too leapt in
And strongly swam, with hope to win
His life and freedom: then with shout
And frantic yell, the priest cried out:
"Come back, false thief, come back, I say."
The Bear swam on, and cried "Nay! nay!
Call as ye will, I come not back,
Still sounds within mine ears the crack

VIII. The

Of stones and staves, and mighty fain Bear's reward. Of freedom am I once again.' Most heartily the honey tree He banned, and cursed the Fox that he Had so betrayed him that he crept Fool-like therein, then wildly wept, Lamenting loss of ears and hood. Thus grieving, drave he down the flood A mile or more, then lastly waxed Aweary, and his strokes relaxed, Made for the bank and came aland. His limbs so bruised, he scarce could stand, But length-long stretched, lay still, and groaned, And sighed, and bitterly bemoaned His wretched fate, his breath came quick, Red blood suffused his eyes, and sick He felt in head and limb, and cried As one who recked not though he died.

> HEARKEN what next the Fox hath done: From out of Lantfert's yard hath won His thievish hand, a well fed hen. And in his wallet laid her, then A by-track took he, that he weened Was known to him alone, well screened With thickset hedges; as along This path he trod a merry song He tuned, and scarcely could contain His joy, so blithe of heart and fain He felt in deeming Bruin dead; And cried: "Now have I right well sped, For he who most opposed and let My work at Court, is killed, and yet Wotteth no man the deed was mine, And therefore doth my heart incline To merriment." As he spoke these words,

His eyes the Fox cast riverwards, And spied where Bruin lay at rest. VIII. The Bear's reward.

Then straightway was his heart oppressed With grief far greater than before His joy had been. Vexation tore His soul, and angrily he chid At Lantfert, who he deemed had rid The earth of Bruin:

"Ah! lewd fool!"
He cried, "thou hast not in the school
Of wisdom learned. God give to thee
A shameful death, who could not see
The chance thou hadst, but fool-like lost,
Of good bear-venison free of cost,
Unsought, yet placed within thine hand."
Thus chiding came he to a stand
Near where the wounded Bear lay: bled
The poor sick beast from ears and head,
And whom but Reynard might he thank?
Then standing near him on the bank
Loud spake the Fox, in cruel scorn:
"Dear priest, God give you a good morn."

Within himself the victim cried
"Ah! ribald thief! would thou hadst died,
Ere thou cam'st hither." Reynard said:
"Forgat ye, when in haste ye sped
From Lantfert's yard, ye had not paid
For that rich honey which ye made
So free to feast on? Grievous shame
Such conduct were, and worthy blame
Of all good men. Wilt thou that I
Requite the owner honestly
On thy behalf? Pray found ye nice
And good that honey? Did the price

33

Well suit your purse? Desire ye more From that exhaustless honey store? And, dearest Eme, ere hence I go Indulge my ardent wish to know What holy order 'tis doth claim Thy sacred vows? Some house of fame Dost rule, as Abbot? Have the shears, Which gave ye tonsure, nipped your ears? The holy hood which hides your head Seems, like your gloves, of deep blood-red. Well fitted art thou, as I ween, Within the choir to sing Compline."

The Bear with wrathful sorrow heard These flouting gibes, yet not one word Of answer deigned, whereas he saw As yet no means whereby to draw A worthy vengeance on his foe. Slowly he turned his face to go His homeward road, and then the tide Once more he sought, and soon that side Where lay the Court, with swimming, wan. Alas! what troublous thoughts began Now to assail him; much he fears That when men note his loss of ears, His wretched state will prove but sport To those, who love him not, at Court. His foremost paws are reft of skin, And much he doubts his power to win His goal on foot, yet needs he must, And sitting upright, through the dust And mire he strove, and thus progressed A mile or twain, though sore distressed, Rolling and wentling as he might. When first from far he hove in sight, Much wondered those who saw him, who

Could be this uncouth beast; none knew The late proud envoy, till the King, Foremost in this, as everything, Exclaimed: "Lord God! is this the Bear Who in such sorry plight doth fare Again to Court? where then hath he Been thus entreated shamefully? Both ears he lacks, and o'er his head Where skin late was, is he bebled; With what wild set can he have been?" Therewith the Bear cried out: "I ween That never since this world was made Hath Bear more basely been betrayed."



HEN through the beasts who stood in ring,
Stepped Bruin forth, and said: "O King,
To thee with earnest voice I cry
For vengeance on the perfidy
Of Reynard Fox: behold, I pray,
How handled have I been this day,
By base device, while thee I served,
My body torn, my frame unnerved;
My foremost feet bereft of claws,
My ears shorn off, and both my jaws
All skinless made."

"Say then how durst," Exclaimed the King, "this beast accurst Such crime commit? Now by my crown I swear, that ere two suns go down

IX. The Bear's Such vengeance on his head shall fall ill tale. As Fox ne'er suffered."

Then for all The wisest beasts he sent, and sought Advice how justice might be wrought On Reynard Fox for this great wrong: And all the council, old and young, Concluded well it were that he Were once again dayed instantly Before the assembly, to abide Full judgment. Then all voices cried, "Our will it is that Tybert Cat Should serve the summons; Bruin gat, 'Tis true, sore handling, far more fit To match the Fox is Tybert's wit Than mere brute force."

The King, with grave And solemn nod, approval gave, And said no choice could better be

In such extreme emergency.



·X·HOW·THE·KING·SENT · ·TYBERT·THE·CAT·TO·THE · ·FOX·&·HOW·HE·SPED·THERE ; IN·

THEN spake the King: "Sir Tybert, thou Shalt seek out Reynard, as it now Hath been decreed, and shortly say That yet a second time hath day Been set whereon to bring his plea Before the Court. Although he be Right fell to other beasts, full trust He hath in thee, and surely must

Give heed to all that ye advise. But should he as a fool despise Thy friendly counsel, say thou then The King, advised by wisest men, The third dread warning will declare, And day him lastly.—Should he dare Refuse to come e'en then, we will No longer scruple to fulfil Stern duty, but hot wrath will deal, That knows nor mercy nor appeal, And fire and sword shall ruthless rage O'er all the Fox-born lineage." Spake Tybert then: "Dear Lord and King, The men who counsel thee this thing Are not my friends: what can I do To hale the Fox? Great King, with true And earnest heart I humbly call On thee to send some other; small And feeble am I—if the Bear, Stout, bold, and strong, did evil fare, And fail to bring him, little hope Have I with such rude beast to cope."

"Nay, nay," the King said, "Tybert, ye Are wise and learned, though ye be Not big, and oftentimes good craft With better aim may speed a shaft Than mightiest strength."

The Cat replied:
"Dear Lord, thy will must I abide,
And shoulder set to do this work:
God give me grace, that though it irk
My heart right sorely, yet I may
Achieve the mission."

Soon the way
Took Tybert towards Malperdy's height,

Tybert's hard days.

And straightway hove within his sight Saint Martin's bird-he quickly kens The fowl of omen, bane of hens-And cries aloud: "Hail, gentle bird, Since thou thy wings turn hitherward, Oh! fly the dexter side for luck. Therefrom may I advantage pluck." Alas! towards the left side flew The bird, and sadly Tybert knew Presage of harm: if towards the right The fowl had flown, all gay and light The Cat had journeyed, now with sorrow He wended, fearing lest the morrow Should bring mishap, yet ne'ertheless He strove his failing heart to dress In pleasant hope, as men oft do Though boding fear their hearts imbue.

Malperdywards then Tybert ran, And, when the Fox's house he wan, Found Reynard standing at the gate. "The rich God's blessing on you wait," Quoth Tybert: "from the King I come, Whose menace threats your life and home, Unless ye wend with me to Court."

Replied the Fox: "May every sort
Of luck and blessing be thy lot,
Dear Tybert." Throughly did he wot
That fairest words are small of cost;
Yet while he spake his heart was crost
With evil schemes. "This night," said he,
"As guest shalt thou abide with me
And share my homely frugal cheer:
Soon as we see white dawn appear,
Together Courtwards will we hie.

Dear Cousin, speak I truthfully,
Affirming that of all my kin
I love thee best, and hope to win
Thy fond regard. But yesterday
Came Bruin hither; sooth to say,
I like him not, he looked so shrewd,
Of haughty mien, of manners rude,
Of voice so loud, of form so strong;
And when he claimed that I along
With him should fare, I said him nay:
Though poor, much liefer would I pay
A thousand marks than with him fare.
But, Cousin, joy 'twill be to share
The road with thee, so soon as dawn
Doth drive drear night from wood and lawn."

Exclaimed the Cat: "What needs delay? The waxing moon mocks waning day, And true delight it were together To fare in this sweet summer weather."

"Dear Cousin," quoth the Fox, "by night Forego we many a pleasant sight, The while, in open, cheerful day, Good hap find wenders by the way, When dark suspicion doth betide Night-faring folk, therefore abide Within my house."

"What sort of meat," Quoth Tybert, "have ye then to eat,

Should I make stay?"

"For wholesome food," Quoth Reynard, "lack we not, with good Sweet honeycomb—will that suffice?"

Said Tybert: "Have ye then no mice?

By honeycomb I set small store, And though some folk esteem it more Than aught, I far prefer a mouse, Beyond all else the wealthiest house Can furnish."

"Say ye so indeed,
Dear Tyb? thou then on mouse shalt feed
In royal wise: a priest hard by
Doth live, within whose barn there lie
Such heaps that, thereto were he fain,
A man with mice might fill a wain.
I, many a time, have heard this priest
Bemoan the harm they do; a feast
Thou well may'st make there."

"Say ye so?"

Exclaimed the Cat: "pray let us go Thither at once, and I am thine."

Quoth Reynard: "Doth your heart incline Thereto so greatly, that above All else beside, fat mice ye love?"

"If mice I love!" the Cat exclaimed:
"Yea! than all delicacies famed
For savour—venison, flawmes, or pasty—
I find fat mice more sweet and tasty;
Lead on to where fat mice abound,
And for all time shall I be found
Thy firmest friend:—though thou hadst slain
My sire and mother, and shouldst stain
Thy hands with blood of all my kin,
Such rare mouse feast my heart should win."

SAID Reynard: "Ye but mock and jape Therewith."

The Cat said: "I but shape

My tongue to truth, so help me God!"
Said Reynard, with a gentle nod
Of seeming doubt, "If so I wist,
It then should fall that, an ye list,
Of mice ye might in truth be full."

"Full!" cried the Cat: "therein ye pull A long-bow shot; that scarce could be." "Ye jape," quoth Reynard.

"Nay," quoth he:

"A fat mouse liefer would I hold," Than noble, coined of finest gold."

"Forth fare we then," cried out the Fox, "And ere once more the chiming clocks With merry peal give out the hour, Mice, thick as raindrops in a shower, Shalt thou behold."

"Right well I know 'Neath thy safe conduct may I go,"
The Cat said, "to Montpelier hence."

"Now speak'st thou like a cat of sense," The Fox replied, "but why delay? Too long we tarry."

Then away
They fared, till near the barn they stood,
Well built, and walled about with mud.
Now so it happed, that through a hole
Worked in the wall, the Fox oft stole
A fatted hen, and yet one more
Had snatched thereout the night before.
The priest had noted this, and set
A gryn with running noose, to let
The prowling beast from further theft;
This Reynard saw, and planned a deft
And cunning trick, his foe to trap.

So said, "Dear Tybert, lucky hap Hath left a hole through which to creep Within the barn, and there a heap Of mice awaits thee, hark! how shrill Their piping sounds—enjoy thy fill—In then! while I abide thee here. Nay, wherefore lingerest thou? doth fear Withhold thy steps? My heart doth burn With earnest longing to return To Ermelyne, whose smiles await Our coming, why dost hesitate?"

Quoth Tybert: "Is it then your rede, Dear friend, with fearless foot to speed Within this hole? These priests be oft Most wily shrews, for all their soft Fair glozing speech—I dread some harm."

"Oho! Dear Tybert, doth alarm
Pervade thy breast?" false Reynard cried:
"Dost fear that evil can betide
While I stand near? What aileth thee?"
The Cat, ashamed, sprang hastily
Within the hole—the cruel gryn
Flew home with sharp and sudden spin,
And caught him, as though swung from bough
With cord around the throat. Ah! now
Hath Reynard foully snared his guest:
Oh! treacherous host! Oh! Cat unblest.

In vain attempted he to spring
From out the hole, the tightening string
Held fast his neck. False Reynard saw
His dupe's distress, and heard him wraw
And shriek with pain, the while, above,
He laughing stood, and cried: "D'ye love
Fat mice, dear Tybert? are they good?

Knew Martinet hereof, he would, I make no doubt, with pleasure bring Thee savoury sauce. How sweet ye sing The while ye dine! Is that I pray The custom used at Court to-day? Lord God! If Isegrym did share This feast with thee, I then should bear A heart as light as bird in May."

When nought availed to break away
The cord which held him, Tybert mowed
And galped so hideously and loud,
That out his bed sprang Martinet,
And cried: "Thank God! the gryn I set
Hath caught the thief that stole our hens,
And scared the sheep from out their pens.
Arouse ye all to deal him due
And fit reward! Haste, all of you!
Shake off dull slumber and awaken!
Up! Up! The villain Fox is taken!"

The priest, barefoot, ran through the dirt, All mother-naked but for shirt, And Julock called, his wife, to light An offering candle. Quickly dight Young Martinet a heavy stake, And dealt such strokes as well might break The prisoner's bones, and tore his eye From out the socket.

"Thou shalt die," Roared forth the priest, and drave a blow Which missed its aim, or else alow The Cat had lain.

"Nay, then my life Shall dear be bought," above the strife Shrieked Tybert, as the parson's calf He seized and wellnigh bit in half.

"Harrowe!" yelled out the priest. "I'm dead." And fainting, kissed the ground, and bled In such full tide, that well 'twould seem His spirit drank drear Lethe's stream.

Hereat in wild despair his wife
Screamed, "Help! Oh! help! my love, my life,
Awake! look up! awake, I say,
Ah me! alack and well-a-day!
Accursed be the hand which set
This hideous trap, through which hath met
My dearest man such evil fate!
What though the Fox should extirpate
All fowls that flock the teeming earth!
Shall wretched birds be counted worth
My husband's life?"

The while that she Thus raved, the Fox with ill-timed glee Stood by, and watched her wild affright, And then with mocking words made light Of her distress.

"Dame Julock, now,"
Cried he, "'twere surely well to bow
Your head in thankful resignation
To Heaven's good will, a dispensation
Of mercy can it fail to be,
If thy dear man, from earth set free,
Attains the heavenly mansions blest?
There shall he find sweet peace and rest
From thy sharp tongue. He loved to preach,
Each week, what joy 'twould be to reach
The home of saints. Nay, dry thy tears,
And let sweet hope assuage thy fears:
Though thou be widowed, yet thou may'st
Ere long the joys of wedlock taste
Once more, if fortune send some fool,

Unware how oft the cucking-stool Had charge of thee for thy sharp tongue In days gone by." X. Tybert's hard days.

Then gaily sung
The Fox for joy—and cried: "Good-day!
Time wears, and I must needs away."

THUS, Bruin, priest, and Tybert marred, He blithely hied him burrowward.

Now hearken how the Cat escaped The jaws of death.

While all folk shaped Their hands to tend the wounded priest, They clean forgot the struggling beast, Who ceased thereon to yell and wraw, And plied his unspent strength to gnaw And bite apart the cruel gryn That wrung his neck, and thus to win Sweet freedom—this achieved, he ran With foot as swift as erewhile Pan Pursued fair Syrinx; till at last, His strength foredone, his breath o'erpast, His wounds grown stiff, all worn and spent, With limp and stumble, forward went, Through darksome hours, the weary wight, Till morning waxed from grey to white Above the hills, and lastly came Before the Court, so bowed with shame, And bent with grief, as must betray To all men's eyes that he the play Had been of adverse Fortune. Nought He spake his woe, but humbly sought Before the throne to lay his grief.

EXCLAIMED the King: "Hath then this thief 45

And traitor once again defied Our high command, and dared deride Our envoy? Then by Heaven I swear My hand no longer shall forbear To crush this scorner of all right And justice."

Quickly bid he dight
A solemn council, formed of wise
And learned men, who might advise
Some means whereby the Fox should be
O'ermastered in his subtlety,
And brought before the Court to make
Submission, or the upshot take.



XI. HOW. GRYMBERT. THE. DACHS. SPAKE, AGAIN. FOR. REYNARD.

While Reynard's friends rejoiced, his foes Wondered, when Grymbert Dachs arose (The Fox's sister's son) and said: "Dear Lord, though twice had trespassed My Eme, beyond what he hath done, We have by no means yet o'ergone The remedies that may be used To bring him here. He hath refused Thy summons twice, now let him be A third time summoned, as a free, Unhindered man. And if again He scorn your bidding, quick must rain Death and destruction on his head."

"Say, then, who think ye would be sped

On such an errand," quoth the King, "And risk eyes, ears, and life to bring So fell a beast to bay? Not one, I trow, of all who live would own Himself so lightly for a fool."

Quoth Grymbert Dachs: "Beneath thy rule, So help me God! lives one who dare This stigma brave. I forth will fare In person, at thy word, to try My skill in this emergency."

"Go forth, Sir Grymbert, but see well," The King replied, "that thou a fell And subtle beast must deal with: ware Ye need to be, lest he some snare Or pitfall shapeth."

"Rest content,"
Quoth Grymbert, as he gaily went
His way, "that thou ere long shalt see
The Fox fall low on bended knee."

With nimble foot, and cheerful heart, Malperdyward doth Grymbert start; And thither come the Fox he found At home, and littered on the ground In darksome corner, Ermelyne Lay with her whelps.

"Right well beseen
Ye be, dear Uncle, and fair Aunt,"
Quoth Grymbert, "nought could more enchant
Mine eyes than thus to find ye well,
But dearest Eme, plain truth to tell,
Great hurt your absence from the Court
Is like to cause ye: ill report
Men spread about thy life, and good
It were no longer ye withstood

XI. Dachs' redes avail.

The King's command. Come, then, with me— For, should ye still withhold, 'twill be An evil case. 'Tis now the third And latest warning that my word Affords thee: plain unvarnished truth Is this advice, and if forsooth Ye dare neglect it, and abide Till falls the morrow's eventide. No wit can then avail to save Or thee or thine, but thou must brave Within three days a siege about Thine house and home. The King with rout Of armed men, will 'fore it set A rack and gallows; what shall let Thee then from death? List all I say For gospel truth, or on that day Nor thou, nor wife, nor child shall 'scape The grave, which open-mouthed doth gape For all your lives. 'Tis therefore best Ye Courtwards wend with me, and rest Assured that there shall well avail Thy subtle counsel: stranger tale Hath oft been heard, than that thou quit May'st go of all complaints, and sit In honour o'er the heads of those Ill beasts who boast themselves thy foes. Yea! many a time hast thou, ywis, Run much more dangerous risks than this."

THE Fox replied: "Good sooth ye say, Dear neighbour Grymbert, straightaway 'Twere well to wend with you, e'en now, To face the Court, whereat I trow My subtle counsel sorely lacks. Once there, perchance the King may wax Kind, good, and merciful to me,

48

XI. Dachs' redes avail.

Can I but gain impartially His ear to weigh what I have done. Methinks, though my misdeeds had run Much greater lengths, yet scarce could stand The realm without me. 'Tis my hand Hath ordered all things, and the King Well knows my wit o'ermastering. Though some right fell to meward be, Yet, King and Lords, note carefully My sage advice. When all are blind, To Reynard must they turn to find True words of wisdom; ever best His craft and cunning stand confessed. Some cruel men with mind accurst, Have sworn against my life the worst That lieth in them—that I own Hath ofttimes o'er my spirit thrown A pall of sadness—many may One friendless man to death betray. Yet, nathless, were it well to go With thee, dear friend, each bitter foe To face and answer, than to set At venture all our lives, and let Them thus be lost. Now forth we fare To meet my fate: right well aware And conscious am I of the might The King doth wield, and whatso right And just he counts, that thing must I Accept and bear with, patiently."

With tenderest voice, to Ermelyne He said: "Dear dame, on thee I lean To act as faithful prop and stay Of this dear home, while far away My duty calls me. Special care Give thou to both our sons, and rare

XI. Dachs' redes avail.

Shall be thy recompense; first see Thou well to Reynkyn, who shall be My second self: dear Rosel's skill In theft hath promise, and he will In time, I trust, become a thief Of great renown: past all belief I love my children, and if God Should give me grace to 'scape the rod That threats my life, and once again To reach my home, ah! then with fain And grateful heart shall I to you Give loving thanks:—dear heart, adieu." He turned and took the Courtward road.

Ah! God! how sorrowful abode
Lone Ermelyne then beside her small
Disfathered whelps, for he who all
The house provided, now was gone,
And she left helpless and alone,
Bereft of him who was to her
Protector, spouse, and victualler.



·XII·HOW:REYNARD WAS ·SHRIVEN:ON:HIS·WAY· ·TO:THE:COURT

THE twain had fared but little while
When Reynard said: "I feel how vile
My sins have been, and surely know
That now in jeopardy I go
To lose my life. I sore repent
The unholy way in which I've spent
So many years: no priest is here

XII. Reynard shrift prays.

To give me shriving, therefore, dear And worthy Nephew, unto thee Will I confess me—contritely; Assured I feel, that were I shriven, I less should dread to go to Heaven."

Said Grymbert: "Eme, if thou a mind For shriving hast, thou must behind Thee leave all lust to rob and steal."

Quoth Reynard: "That I deeply feel, And so, Confiteor tibi Pater A heap of evil deeds, and later Will tell them fully, one by one, And shrift received, and penance done, Shall wend lighthearted."

Grymbert said:
"If thou the slough of sin wouldst shed
Through shrift, then English speak, I pray."

Said Reynard: "Much I grieve to say, Few men have done more wickedness Than he who humbly doth confess To thee his sins, and penance craves. A many beasts have found their graves Through my misdeeds. Mine Eme, the Bear, With honeycombs did I ensnare: And Tybert Cat, with hope of mice. Then Chanticlere did I entice From out his yard, with specious tale, And ate his children. Time would fail To go through all my crimes. The King And Queen I slandered with a string Of vilest falsehoods, which will stick For ever by them. Many a trick On Isegrym the Wolf I've played:

shrift prays.

XII. Revnard A monk at Eelmare was he made By my assistance, where I too Donned monkish hood and gown. He drew Therefrom small profit. When he sighed To ring the bells, I tightly tied The bell-rope round his feet, and soon He rang therewith so wild a tune, That, mazed and scared, folk ran to see Who made such hideous minstrelsy. And when 'twas found that Isegrym Rang out the chime, they fell on him With sticks and staves, till helpless left, Half dead he lay, of sense bereft. Another time the dullard sought Fishing to learn of me, and bought His knowledge dearly.

Just across

The fallow fields, at Vermedos, A wealthy priest there lived, who kept A well stored spence, wherein I crept, When hunger prompted, through a hole, And many a flitch of bacon stole, Time and again. I thither led The Wolf one winter's day, and said: 'Dear Isegrym, if you but creep Through this small hole, a wondrous heap Of beef and bacon may ye find.' With joy he crept therein, and blind To future chances, so much ate Of savoury viands, that too late He found so vastly had his size Of girth increased, that in no wise His body through that hole would pass By which he entry gained. 'Alas! Dear Reynard,' cried he, 'help me out! My answer was a deafening shout,

XII. Reynard shrift prays.

As sped I down the village street. And roused the neighbours; then as fleet As drives the south-west wind, I ran To where the priest, good easy man, Was set to enjoy his midday meal— A fatted capon; high the steel Was raised with purpose to dissever The tempting morsel: with a clever And well aimed stroke the fowl I cleared From off the dish, and disappeared Like lightning flash, then made my way Towards the larder—'Stay, thief, stay,' Roared forth the priest, 'who ever saw So gross an outrage on the law, As that a Fox should dare to come And rob a priest, within his home?'

"Therewith he cast at me the knife His right hand grasped, whereby my life Came near its ending—then, the board He loves so well, when richly stored With dainty viands, hastily Thrusting aside, right nimbly he Jumped up, and rushed forth crying: 'Maim Or slay the Fox!' with either aim A raging crowd of people flew In hot pursuit, but passing through The hole where lately Isegrym Had made his entry, close to him I dropped the capon on the ground— Not for his benefit—but found The burden more than I could bear: And well it was I left it there, For when the priest burst ope the door, The capon found he on the floor Beside the Wolf, while through the hole

XII. Reynard By which I entered, out I stole shrift prays. And went my way.

At once the priest Clutched at the capon, and so ceased To track my steps, with wonder stricken To see the Wolf, (in whose eyes quicken Alarm and terror,) loud shouts he: 'What wondrous vision do I see? A red fox snatched away my capon, And here the thief hath wolfish shape on! Lay on, good friends, beat, break and tear This plundering wretch, although he wear A magic form.' Then fiercely fell The crowd on Isegrym, pell-mell, With sticks and staves, until he lay As all foredone and dead; away They dragged him over blocks and stones (A bag of bruised and broken bones) Without the village bounds, and cast His body in a ditch.

At last,
Once more to health and strength he grew,
But how that happed I never knew—
Nor greatly cared—my grief but slight
Had been though he had died outright.

"THE Wolf another time I led
To rob a henroost, where I said
A cock and seven fat hens arow
Sat on a perch. As down below
We stood and watched, a high fall-door
I pointed out, and said: 'The floor,
Where sit the birds, is just behind
That door, climb up, and ye shall find
Your heart's desire.' He laughing went,
Suspecting nought, but all intent

XII. Reynard shrift prays.

On plenteous feasting; here and there He snuffed about, then cried: 'Some snare I fear ye set, or jape ye play, Dear Nephew;' softly quoth I, 'Nay! The man, dear Eme, who good will win Must something venture: further in The birds are roosting,' then a shove I gave, and lo! the door above Fell with a thundering noise adown, That well might rouse a spell-bound town.

"As through the house the clatter rang, The slumberers started up, and sprang From out their beds in wild affright, Shrieking aloud, 'A light! a light!' And when they found 'twas Isegrym Who caused their fear, they set on him, And strook his body nigh to death.

"Dear Nephew, shame admonisheth
My tongue to leave some things untold
That scarce were fitting to unfold
To youthful ears, but deeply I
Repent my past carnality.
Here ends this woful roll of crimes
That stain the memory of past times,
And breed remorse within my breast:
But now, unburdened and confessed,
My mind feels easier, shrift I pray
At thy kind hands, to drive away
The clouds that hover o'er my soul,
Thy healing words shall make me whole."

GRYMBERT, who subtle was, and wise, Replied: "Dear Eme, this tree supplies The means of penance"; straight he broke A slender twig, of fair grown oak, shrift prays.

XII. Reynard And said, "Dear Uncle, wouldst thou quite Absolve thy soul, thy body smite Three times with this small rod, then bound Three times across it on the ground: Thou must not stumble, but keep straight Thy legs, if thou wouldst expiate Thy crimes: then take the rod in hand And three times kiss it, this will stand For token of obedience meek. No further penance need ye seek, But count your sins as wiped away, From childhood's hour till this same day." The Fox was glad.

> Then Grymbert said: "Dear Eme, henceforward be ye wed To holy works, read well your psalms; Keep fasts and holy days; give alms; Frequent the Church; forthon leave sin, And theft and treason, so within Due time ye may to Heaven attain." The Fox declared his heart right fain Of holy counsel, and content Seemed Grymbert-straight they Courtward went.

Beside the road they took, there stood A Black-nuns' convent, fair and good Of structure: capons, hens, and geese, Strolled round the walls in careless peace; Or basked in sprawling heaps together, Beneath the sunlit springtide weather. These Reynard noted; spake he nought, But all astray his nephew brought, Until they neared the fowls, when he, All unawares, and suddenly, Snapped at a heedless capon, strayed Within his treacherous reach, and made

His feathers fly aloft in air.
The Dachs turned sharply, saw the scare,
And cried: "What Eme! thou cursed man!
Wilt thou again incur the ban
Of sin, wherefrom thou art but free
Some few short seconds? Wilt thou be
For one poor capon doomed to Hell?"

XII. Reynard shrift prays.

"I own, dear Nephew, 'twas not well," Quoth Reynard, "but I clean forgot My shrift—pray God I suffer not This once—I swear that nevermore Will I transgress;" so turned they o'er A little bridge, but Reynard's eye Still watched the poultry—verily, "That thing which in the bone is bred, From out the flesh will ne'er be shed," And though to hang on gallows tree Might be his fate, yet ever he Watched every bird that came in sight As passed they onward, left and right. His glances Grymbert saw, and spake: "Foul, false deceiver! wilt thou take Thine eye no instant off the birds?"

The Fox said: "Nephew, suchlike words Ye much misdo to use towards me, For sweet devotion, wofully, Your speech disturbs: I did but say A paternoster by the way, For all the souls of hens and geese, That through my means, have had surcease From watchful care of these good nuns. Alas! my burdened memory shuns The wicked deeds of past ill days."

Too well did Grymbert know the ways

shrift prays.

XII. Reynard Of Reynard Fox to give much heed To suchlike pious talk; with greed The Fox's eyes still sought for prey.

> So came they whence they went astray, And Courtward turned.

Sharp, quick, and short Came Reynard's breath as now the Court They neared, for all too well he knew How great his crimes, what meed his due.



XIII·HOW·THE·FOX·CAME TO THE COURT AND HOW HE EXCUSED HIM BEFORE THEKING

O soon as through the Court 'twas known' That Reynard Fox his face had shown Within its pale, not one so poor Was found of kin or friends, but sure He felt that, 'gainst the Fox complaint 'Twas safe to make, though ne'er so faint And slight his grievance.

Reynard's look Was high and fearless, nought he shook Or trembled coweringly, but went With eye unmoved, and brow unbent, By Grymbert's side throughout the street. Yea! truly no King's son could meet The gazer's eye with prouder stare, As though the worth of one poor hair He had not trespassed or misdone.

So marched he boldly to the throne, 58

XIII. Reynard

Where sat the King, and cried: "God give To thee great Lord, the while you live, Honour and worship: never King Had servant who in everything Was truer liege, than I have been To thee through life: though some I ween Now stand within this Court, whose joy Would rise past words could they destroy Thine old-time friend, yet God I thank That nought believe ye them, but rank Such false deceiving liars rightly, Nor let their tales deceive thee lightly. It well to God may be complained, That lying flatterers have obtained In these last days too much belief In lordly Courts: with shame and grief Deceivers and false shrews I see In power and great authority, To good men's scathe; I humbly pray That God, to such, due hire will pay.

"Peace!" cried the King, "base thief and traitor, Of honest men most vile delator, Thou well canst gloze fair specious tales To blind men's eyes, but nought avails By one poor straw thy flattering speech: Deem'st thou thereby to overreach Thy judge, and make of him a friend? Too well he sees thine aim and end. Thy service towards thy King hath been So base and treacherous, that I ween Reward shall follow, just and due. Wouldst thou then have me deem it true That thou hast kept the peace I swore Throughout my realm?"

The Cock no more 59

XIII. Reynard Could hold his wrath hereat, but cried: "Alas, 'twas through that peace that died My children."

Said the King: "Hold still Thy tongue, good friend, while I fulfil Stern duty towards this losel thief, 'Tis mine to avenge thy thrice told grief."

And then again did he address The Fox, stern-voiced and pitiless.

"Oh, robber shrewd! and murderer fell! How true thy boast to love me well. Thine hand hath shown on Bruin Bear And Tybert Cat, who both declare Thy deeds, though scant of words they be. But that day's work shall cost to thee Thy life, I swear In nomine Patris et Christi filii!"-said The Fox: "Dear Lord, if Bruin's head Is blood besprent, with broken crown, Can ye with justice set that down To my account? He basely stole Sweet honeycombs from out a bole Of oak, which lay in Lantfert's yard. If, in revenge, their owner marred His head and limbs, am I to blame? Surely, ere through the water came He hither, a beast so strong of limb Might lightly have avenged him, For all he suffered. Tybert Cat Next came, and friendly talk and chat Awhile we held, then lastly he, Scorning my counsel, suddenly, Went off to rob the parson's house, Whence stole he many a dainty mouse,

60

XIII. Reynard at Court.

And thereby came to grievous ill.

My dear liege Lord, though thou shouldst spill

My blood, or blind, hang, seethe or roast

My body, yet I proudly boast

A conscience clear. Thou, King, art strong,

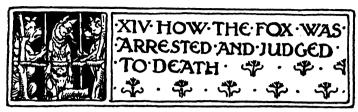
And I but feeble, yet no wrong

I fear to suffer through thy might,

'Fore all thou lovest truth and right."

As Reynard ended, Bellyn Ram Stood boldly forth, and cried: "No drachm Of truth or justice dost thou say, Thou base-born Fox, and Dame Olwey, My faithful spouse, will bear me out."

While yet he spake an angry shout Of loud complaint arose. The Bear With all his lineage, claimed a share Tybert Cat In Reynard's censure. Was joined with Isegrym, who sat In moody wrath: the fierce Wild-boar, Cuwaert the Hare, though trembling sore, The Goat and Kid, Brunel the Goose, Baldwin the Ass, from toil set loose, The Bull, the Camel, and the Ox, All raised their voices 'gainst the Fox, With loud demand that forthwith he Should be arrested. Readily The King thereto gave ear, and cried, "To prison with him—let him bide In closest bonds—right well I wot His crimes deserve a murderer's lot."

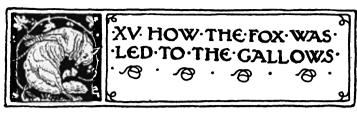


EREON a parliament was held, Which found that so unparalleled Were Reynard's deeds, that nought but death Could wash their vileness. In a breath, Reynard to each gave full reply, And though all men spontaneously Agreed that ne'er did beasts devise More sound impeachments, yet so wise Were Reynard's answers, that folk stood Amazed to hear their likelihood. But pleadings done, and both sides heard By King and Council, 'twas averred That guilty was he, past a doubt.— Take note how oft it falleth out. The feeblest hath the worst.—Then gave The Court its sentence—that the grave Must close o'er Reynard, and that he Should deck the gallows speedily.

Alas! though still he sought to reach His judges' hearts with flattering speech, Nought could avail him. All as one, Cried out that justice must be done As now decreed,—yet still were left Some faithful friends, whose hearts were cleft With woe to think the Fox must die, And roomed the Court most mournfully. The King took note, how younglings went,

XIV. Reynard's arrest.

Of Reynard's kin, with heads low bent In grief, and musing thereon said: "Behoveth counsel ere we shed The Fox's blood; although a shrew, Past doubt or question, no small few Who own his lineage smack of good." While thus he communed, nearby stood The Cat, the Wolf, and Bruin Bear, On whom devolved the ungracious care Of hanging Reynard. Tybert cried: "How now? why lag ye? eventide Comes on apace, why friends so slow? See here stout hanging-trees arow, Whereon to sling the Fox; if he Should 'scape this peril, who can see What next may hap? So great his wit. And subtle craft, that fraught were it With folly past belief, to give Him yet another chance to live, And mar us once again; why stand We idle thus? Let each set hand To place the gibbet, ere 'tis night. Said Isegrym: "Here ready dight Behold a gallows," then he sighed; That saw the Cat, and mocking cried: "What! Isegrym, be'st thou afeard? Or is thy memory grown so seared, That pity overmastereth will To hang the recreant who did kill Thy brethren twain? An' ye were good And wise, so long ye had not stood A-tarrying when ye might repay The debts of many a long past day."



EEP growled the Wolf, and said: "Ye make, Sir Tybert, much ado, and take My will to task—in case we had A halter here, most wondrous glad And willing should I be to lend My help to speed the traitor's end."

The Fox, who long had held his peace, Now spoke, and said: "To me surcease Ye well may give, and short my pain If so ye will, behold the bane That lightly doth the means afford: See! hangs round Tybert's neck the cord Which caught him, when his greed for mouse Led him to rob the good priest's house. Active and lithe, he well can climb And fix the rope; why lose ve time? Ah! Isegrym, ah! Bruin Bear, Say, is it meet that thus should fare Your nephew at your ruthless hands? I live too long. The law commands The deed ye do: let Bruin lead. And Isegrym, take thou good heed To hold thy prisoner, lest he take Some chance his cruel bonds to break."

Quoth Bruin: "Rarely have I heard Friend Reynard speak so wise a word, For long years past." Then Isegrym
Prayed kith and kin, who stood by him,
To see the prisoner did not slip
By some new wile from out their grip:
By beard and ears some held him fast,
While others round his fore-feet cast
A trammelling net.

The victim heard With grief their speech, which in him stirred Terror, and touched his heart anigh, Then lastly spake, with long-drawn sigh: "Alas! dear Eme, methinks much pain Ye take to do me scathe, yet fain Would I beg mercy: though my grief Seems to afford your heart relief And pleasure, yet I feel assured That, knew my Aunt what woe endured Her well-loved nephew, of old days She would bethink herself, and raise Her voice in his behalf. Now he Am I, to whom whatever be Your will, that can ye work. May shame, In life and death, surround your name, O Tybert Cat: and Bruin Bear, May'st thou of shame have equal share, For both have done to me the worst Within your power. Though death at first Seem strange and hard, yet can I die But once. My Father's death did I Behold soon pass, and now I wend That unknown path, fear nought the end."

Quoth Isegrym: "Since ye bestow Your curse on us, because too slow Ye find our work, may ill betide Our souls if longer we abide."

F

seem short.

XV. Fox days While Isegrym, upon the right, Warded and watched the wretched wight. Against his left was set the Bear, And thus they led him forth to where The gallows stood. With ready will Ran Tybert forwards, wearing still The cord around his neck which caught His head within the gryn, and wrought To him such punishment that yet He writhed beneath it—ne'er forget Could he the woes of that dread night, Fruit of the Fox's vengeful spite.

> Thus Reynard, safely kept by three Stern gaolers, fared on towards the tree Where felons use to meet their fate. The King and Queen, in solemn state, Followed, and in their wake did wend Long courtier trains to watch the end. Then fell the Fox in mighty dread Of grisly death, and visions fled Athwart his brain of how he still Perchance might cozen fate, and fill With shame those men who sought his life, Setting the King with them at strife Through tales and leasings."

"Though," thought he, " My lord be now sore wroth with me For righteous cause, yet in the end Perchance he may become my friend: For if some specious tale I spin, So well invented as to win Credence of King and Council both,— Wise as they be,—and make them loth To hang me, then once more may I My foes o'ercome triumphantly.

66

XV. Fox days seem short.

Quoth Isegrym: "Consider well, Sir Bruin, how 'twas through this fell And evil beast your crown of red Ye came to wear, to-day his head Shall bear your burden. Tybert, climb The gallows swiftly, lose no time To bind a riding knot around The cross-branch, high above the ground: This day I trust, we all may see Our foeman's end; beware lest free Again he break: Sir Bruin, now Hold fast, whilst I against the bough Set up the ladder." Bruin said: "I well shall help him."

Fear and dread. Fell hard on Reynard, who exclaimed: "Now is my spirit quelled, and tamed, For death stands bare before mine eyes, And all my past misdeeds arise, To drive my soul to Hell: great King And gracious Queen, I ask one thing, Ere I depart, one little boon, That may in some degree attune To Heaven my spirit. 'Tis nor less Nor more than this, that I confess To thee, and those who stand anigh, My past misdealings openly. Thus purged, and cleansed, my soul no more Shall feel encumbered as of yore, Nor others be hereafter blamed For treason worked by me, or shamed For theft of mine. Hereby to me Grim death shall somewhat easier be. And when his waters o'er me roll. Pray God to spare my sinful soul."



XVI HOW THE FOX MADE HIS CONFESSION OPENLY BE FORE THE KING AND ALL THOSE WHO WOULD HEAR 1TO SE

HEN those who stood anear him heard The humble boon the Fox preferred, They cried: "O hear him, gracious King, For is it not a little thing He lastly asketh of thee?" Said King Nobel: "Nay then, by my head, Since the desire it seems to be Of all this goodly company That Reynard full confession make Of crime, ere he the journey take Whence none return, I grant amain The boon he asks."

Oh, then was fain
The Fox, who inwardly did cry:
"Give aid, O Spiritus Domini!
Though round about stands many a man
Who willingly my life would ban;
Yet courage from despair I take,
Good luck be mine!" and forth he spake:

"GOOD PEOPLE, hear the tale how I Have spent my days from infancy. From that first hour that I was yeaned, Till dawned the day that saw me weaned, Believe ye well, the woodland wild Had ne'er beheld a sweeter child: Blameless and pure I lived, and played With tenderest lambkins, nought afraid

XVI. Old sins confessed.

Or fraying, till I chanced to bite
One of my playmates, then good-night
To innocence; so wondrous sweet
I found the blood, that other meat
I scorned henceforward: next I heard
The bleat of kids and goats, which stirred
My veins, and twain I straightway slew;
Forthwith I callous waxed, and knew
No pleasure greater than to kill
Hens, ducks, and geese, rejoiced to spill
Their blood for sport.

One winter's day I came on Isegrym, who lay Asleep within a hollowed oak: Awaking, friendlywise he spoke, And forthwith claimed to be mine Eme: 'If that be so,' quoth I, ''twould seem Well we were comrades; 'straight quoth he: 'With right good will,' most cordially. Alas! I sorely did repent Of that alliance—thus it went: Each gave his promise to be true Toward his fellow, and a due Fair share to give of each day's spoil: Then set we forth with earnest toil To hunt the woods and fields; his part It was to rob great beasts, my art Sufficed the smaller things to steal: But when the business was to deal The food betwixt us, less than half Fell to my share; if ram or calf, Or wether took we, for his own He claimed it, and the barest bone Would yield to stay my need, and drave Me off right rudely, as a slave. Then, when we gained a cow or ox

confessed.

XVI. Old sins Alas! still worse would fare the Fox. For Isegrym his wife would bring To join the banquet, and a string Of seven lean cubs, and quickly gone Was Reynard's share. But fortune shone Bright-eyed and gracious at this time, In suchwise that Golconda's clime Holds not more treasure than belongs To me this moment. Poet's songs Have ne'er imagined such untold And heaped-up riches. Silver, gold, And precious stones past counting, gems And pearls, befitting diadems Of mightiest kings lie gathered where My hands have hidden them, and there Must they remain, for now, alas! Those treasures never more can pass From out the darkness where they lie, Since he stands here, condemned to die, Who wots alone their lurking-place. Perchance some happy wight may trace In distant age his footstep thither, Where rests that hoard which nought can wither Or waste or change. The man who gains That glittering wealth, seven goodly wains Will need to bear it whence 'tis hid.

> "My Lord, if thou hast will to rid The earth of him who hath the power This harvest in thy lap to shower, Speak thou the fatal word, and he Will humbly bow to thy decree."

At first the King had barely listened To Reynard's tale; but brightly glistened His eager eyes when once he heard

XVI. Old sins confessed.

Fall from his lips the magic word Of GOLD, and straightway seized was he By hell's foul fiend cupidity. With hot desire his spirit burned To touch these riches, and he turned His voice, forthwith, from tone severe To blandest fluting: "Reynard, dear, Tell me," quoth he, "where may I find This glorious hoard? I have no mind To deal with thee severely; say Where dwells this treasure, and away Thy chains and shackles shall be cast."

O'er Reynard's sinking heart then passed A gleam of hope. "My Lord," he cried, "I fear lest you your best friend chide, When he avows that this great wealth Was gotten by an act of stealth. Nay, start thou not! except for that, The chance is great ye had not sat This day on that high throne where ye Fair justice deal so worthily. Twould seem I was designed by Fate To drag to light and dissipate The vilest plot that ever yet Was planned by reckless men to set Themselves in place of those whom heaven Hath in its highest wisdom given To rule the world. Had this plot sped, Thou hadst been murdered in thy bed!" Therewith deep horror seized the Queen, And cried she: "Reynard, dost thou mean That men we trust in would imbue Their hands in blood? Conjure I you By that far road your soul must go, To clearly speak, and make us know

XVI. Old sins The full dread truth."

Oh, hearken now
How Reynard's flattering words shall bow
The King and Queen to give their love
And kindly wills to him above
All other men, and hinder those
Who labour for his death; unclose
His pack of lies shall he, and fair
Soft glozing speech so bring to bear
On all his matters, that 'twould seem
His life and acts with virtue teem.

With sorrowful countenance he spake, And said: "For thy beloved sake, Great Queen, since thou conjurest me, Will I relate the tale: 'twould be Of small effect that I should lie, Doomed, as I am, forthwith to die. Ye well may credit that my soul I will not jeopard, but the whole Plain truth set forth—for should I tell One falsehood, all the pains of Hell Must be my lot. I nought will say That may not be in plainest way Made good and sure.

Now hear it shown, How good King Nobel, by his own Most trusted servants should have been Murdered, and you, most gracious Queen, Had shared his fate. Alas! what grief Wrings my sad heart to think the chief And foremost movers in this plot Were men of mine own blood. Did not My conscience urge me on to lay This treachery bare, would I betray, Think you, my nearest kith and kin?

But that small voice which works within, Moves me to speak, devoid of fear."

XVI. Old sins confessed.

The King with grave and heavy cheer, Replied: "I charge thee, Reynard, now To say in face of death, if thou Herein dost speak plain, simple truth?"

Exclaimed the Fox: "Deem'st thou forsooth, Here, standing on the very brink Of Heaven, or Hell, that I should think 'Twould serve my turn to forge a lie? Nay! ten times would I rather die A thousand deaths than I should be Condemned to fire eternally." Then with a mighty trembling shook His frame, as though death's agony strook His bones and marrow, but the while He inly laughed with cynic guile, For well he saw how matters turned. The Queen, whose heart with pity burned At Reynard's feigned distress, then prayed The King for grace, and begged that stayed Might be the strife of tongues, while pause Was given to Reynard, that his cause He might set forth, unchecked by dread Of evil hap.

King Nobel said:
"Let silence reign, that Reynard may
Tell forth whate'er he hath to say."

Then spake the Fox: "Let all men hold Their peace, while clearly I unfold, As now commanded by the King, A tale of treason, that will bring Some great ones low—the truth shall spare No man—let guilty souls beware."



XVII HOW THE FOX COZENED THE KING; PERSUADING HIM THAT THE WOLF & THE BEAR WERE HIS FOES, & HOW HE GA THE GRACE OF THE KING &

OW hearken how the Fox began. His eye around the Court he ran, And then the faithful Grymbert called To be his witness, and forestalled Thereby the moment he might need Support and help, for he would plead Grymbert's good name, when any doubt Was cast on tales he told about His friends or foes.

"My Lord," quoth he,
"The onerous charge now laid on me
Is one which I have long forborne:
Past power to tell, my heart is torn
Betwixt stern duty, and the thought
That mine own honour must be bought
By others' woe—and lasting ruin
To Tybert, Isegrym, and Bruin.

"To clear the tale, must I go back
To days when lived my Sire—alack!
That his respected name should be
Involved in fraud and treachery.
Thus, then, it happed: my father found
Deep dolven down beneath the ground
The precious hoard of untold wealth,
Which great King Ermanric by stealth
In long-forgotten times concealed
From envious eyes. When now revealed

(By magic arts, none other knew) To my dear Sire, alas! he grew Henceforth so proud, that he aspired To rule the whole wide world, and fired With this strange madness, in despite Of law and reason, sense and right, Tybert the Cat, as envoy sent To journey o'er the vast extent Of wild Ardenne, seek out the Bear, Make him the offer of a share In wealth untold, with vows that he Would homage do and fealty To Bruin, and anoint him King In your despite, and shortly bring Your royal line to nought. Dazzled at this great prospect, sware To follow out his rede, for long His heart had dreamed of suchlike wrong.

"Hot foot, he straight to Flanders sped, And there, as he were King and head Of beasts, my Father hailed him. Then With subtle wit past mortal ken, The wise and helpful Grymbert they Seduced to join them, nor made stay Thereat, but sought out Isegrym, And much I grieve to say, with him The Cat conspired.

Beside a thorp,
'Twixt Ghent and Yft, the weft and warp
Of treason wove these five, discussed
Their plans, and boldly putting trust
In help and counsel of the fiend
Who reigns in Hell, they lightly weened,
By aid from him, and through the store
My Father owned, they need no more

Doubt full success.

Oh! hearken now,
Great King, how ill from ill doth grow.
These five men pledged a solemn oath,
And plighted each towards other troth,
Confirmed by vows sworn on the head
Of Isegrym, that in thy bed
Thou shouldst be murdered, while the Bear
Should mount thy throne, and boldly wear
At Acon, sacred stole and crown:
My Sire, moreover, vowed to drown,
By bribes, all efforts that thy friends
Or lineage made to stay the ends
These traitors purposed, conquering right
By ill-got wealth and hireling might,
Till loyalty's voice was quenched in death.

"But thus it happed—when morning's breath The conclave brake, my nephew dear, Young Grymbert Dachs, such merry cheer Had made o'ernight, that still he lay Fordrunken through the following day. And then to Dame Sleepcap, his wife, Told forth the plot, but on her life Charged her, that she should nought reveal To living man. Beneath the seal Of holy shrift my wife she told, On pilgrimage, but bade her hold Her shriving close, and made her swear By those three holy Kings, whose fair And precious shrine bedecks Cologne, She ne'er would make the plotting known Till death, nor dare for love or hate, In any form to violate The fateful secret that she held. Hidden she kept it till it welled 76

Forth from her burdened heart to me What time we next joined company: But strictly charged that I should keep The dread disclosure hidden deep Within my breast. Moreover gave She then, with solemn words, such grave And certain tokens that she spoke Unblemished truth, that straight I broke Forth in a fearful death-cold sweat. The while she showed the wide-meshed net Of foul conspiracy. Like lead My heart became, and wellnigh dead Within me felt, while stood my fine Soft fur, like quills of porcupine, Straight out on end.

And then thought I. A likeness may be traced hereby Betwixt the Frogs and us.—they dwelt For ages free as air, yet felt Desire for change, and therefore cried To Jove, and prayed he would provide A Lord to rule them: and he gave To them King Stork, who made a grave Far down his throat, for all who said They owned their souls, and ere long dead Was half the Kingdom. Then they plained Their lot, and gladly had regained Their ancient freedom, but too late Came vain regret, henceforth their fate It was to suffer, for no more. Could freedom reign as heretofore Within their state.

So doth it seem, That had this most nefarious dream Of wicked plotters once been brought To full fruition, past all thought

Our woe had been—by traitors ruled! Ah! then my heart was sharply schooled In dread and fear, when visions crossed My mind that Fortune's freak had tossed Us all beneath the shrewish might Of Bruin, who would those requite He loved not, with affliction's fire: But thee we know for Lord and Sire. Of noble birth, and soul benign, And should we tamely then resign Thy rule to live beneath a Bear? Whilst thou hast filled the kingly chair, All men have lived their lives in peace, Blessed with content, and fair increase Of worldly goods, and should we throw Thy house aside for one we know Hath bred in long ancestral line Folly and madness?

Grief was mine By day and night, the while I thought How I might wreck, and bring to nought My father's counsel, which would make This traitorous churl great lordship take Beyond his fellows: then I prayed On bended knees to Him who made This wondrous world, to safely keep With watchful love which knows not sleep Our gracious Lord and King in health, For nought I doubted that the wealth My father owned he would employ, In league with traitors, to destroy, Or set aside, our honoured Lord; Therefore I sought to trace that hoard From earliest dawn till darkling eve; Nor did my zeal one corner leave Unsearched or covert; every stone

I dug beneath: each moss-o'ergrown And shaggy rock I hid behind, And through each dry stream-bed did wind To track my Father's slot or tread: And time and oft, above his head, 'Mid leafy branches would I watch With patient eye, intent to catch Some hint of where the treasure lay—In shine or storm, by night and day, His every movement I espied.

"At last it happed one Christmas-tide,
That, as I flat upon the ground
Lay couched, my parent with a bound
Appeared from out a hole. My breath
Came short and quick, for certain death
Were mine in case my form were seen.
He scanned around, but friendly screen
A bush afforded, and I lay
Unnoticed, ah! what words could say
The throes I suffered?

When the land
He deemed all clear, he scraped the sand
With painful care across the hole,
Yet worked with vigilance, and stole
A frequent glance around to see
If any watched: then, carefully,
The sand once more made smooth and plain,
With tongue and tail, till not one grain
Appeared displaced; and thus I learned
Some hints which I full oft have turned
To good advantage.

Well content The ancient seemed, and straightway bent His steps towards home.

Ye well may wot

XVII. The

My eyes had closely marked the spot, Fox well goes. Long sought with sleepless pains, and when Its master well had passed from ken, I lightly bounded towards the hole. And burrowing deftly, as a mole, Scratched, clawed, and scraped, with eager feet, The sand away, till entry meet For one of slim-built form was made.

> "My Lord-I hesitate-afraid To put in words the view that burst In glory on me when I first Effected entrance. None I ween Who live, except myself have seen A sight so wondrous and so fair. Past dreaming, and beyond compare For sparkling splendour. Ne'er King reigned Since earth began, but with unfeigned Surprise and wonder had beheld The scene that dazed my vision. Quelled My spirit seemed within me when I gazed around: nor gods nor men, Foretime or late, have ever known More wealth and treasure than was shown In one vast heap—far flashing gold, Plenteous, as though Pactolus rolled His ruddy sands therein: moonlight Could scarce have made the cave more white Than glittering silver showed it; gems Enough to broider all the hems Of royal robes that e'er were worn Since Kings first ruled: the gorgeous morn Ne'er dyed her mantling in such hues As flashed and sparkled: rich tissues From looms of Perse and Ind were there In bales unnumbered, and more rare

> > 80

Than tongue can compass: from the wall Gleamed trophies fitted to recall Great tales of high romance: rich suits Of armour, such as fame reputes The godlike heroes bore of old; Bright burnished steel, inlaid with gold; Fair silver hauberks, fine as gauze Spun from the web the silkworm draws For shroud around him, yet as steel Hard tempered, that no blade could feel Its way therethrough.

Of suchlike gear As queens and high born ladies wear, Mine eyes beheld a paradise Beyond all telling, past all price; Necklets and bracelets, chains and rings, Beset with emeralds shaming spring's New undimmed raiment; coronets bright With diamonds flashing like the light Of sundawn's bursting; lustrous pearls, Dazzling as teeth of laughing girls In bloom of youth; rich rubies, red As that young blood by Herod shed: Sapphires of such surpassing hue As mocked the heaven-reflected blue Of sunniest ocean: topaz rare, That flashed forth gold; and opals fair, The myriad hued.

O'erhead there swung, And through the cave sweet odours flung, Rich lamps, with dædal chasings wrought By curious craftsmanship, and fraught With fragrant spices.

Far around
In heaps, and scattered o'er the ground,
Lay coins of every clime and realm.

81

XVII. The Fox well goes.

G

XVII. The

Lightly might wealth so great o'erwhelm Fox well goes. My Father's mind with maddening dreams Of wild ambition. But meseems That powerless sound mere words to draw The faintest sketch of all I saw Within that wondrous cave. As vain It were to count the falling rain, Or number daisies on the lea. Or tell the myriads of the sea. As strive to bring before thine eyes By force of words, the wondrous prize Once lost, now thine.

My faithful wife I sought forthwith, who by her life And hopes of heaven, on bended knee Swore solemn oaths of secrecy.

"Then swinked we ceaseless, night and day, This good to carry far away, And hide within a deep haw-haw, And then vast tons of earth to draw, And heap o'erhead: now verdant grows The grass thereon, and waving rows Of willows mark the hiding-place Of this great treasure.

Ever apace, While thus we laboured, grew the plot Of treasonous crime. Ye well may wot That burning to fulfil his bent, With thrifty speed my Father went To join his miscreant friends, who backed His wild ambition till he lacked Ruth, fear, or pity.

Hear ye now Their hell-born project, and I trow Thou wilt accord that but for me, 82

Great King, thou'dst fared but wretchedly.

XVII. The Fox well goes.

"The Bear and Wolf sent far and wide
The news o'er all the countryside,
That men might earn unheard-of wage,
In ready coin, would they engage
To fight for Bruin, while my Sire
With nimble foot, which nought could tire,
Bare treasonous letters through the land.
Ah! little wist he while he planned
And plotted thus, his treasure-store
Had vanished! and he nevermore
Should find thereof one penny, though
He fondly hoped at one great blow
To win the world.

When he had been
O'er all the land that lies between
The Elbe and Somme, and listed there
A band of fighting men, who sware
To haste to Bruin's aid as soon
As springtide waked the ringdove's croon,
Homeward he sped again to meet
His friends and fellows, who did greet
With open ears the tales he told
Of scapes and dangers manifold,
Endured and overcome, while he
Had scoured the land of Saxony,
Where hounds and hunters day by day
Pursued him so, that scarce away
He brake with life.

He next displayed
Letters to that fell four, which made
The treacherous heart of Bruin light
And gladsome. Well equipped and dight
With arms, they said, were seventy score
Akin to Isegrym, who swore

XVII. The

That they, with Foxes, Cats, and Bears Fox well goes. Unnumbered, would from out their lairs Come trooping forth at trumpet call To Bruin's aid, but one and all Strict stipulation made that they Should first receive a full month's pay.

> "All this, thank God! I heard and spied And noting how my Father hied Towards where he trowed his treasure lay. With hurried footsteps, in the grey Dim twilight followed, unperceived. Ye Gods! My bosom throbbed and heaved Wellnigh to bursting as he drew Anigh the fateful spot: I knew What rage would seize him when the truth Flashed on his senses: and forsooth When came he near, and saw the hole Gape wide, across his visage stole A fearful look of blank despair,— He entered straight, and soon as ware Of what had happed, came rushing forth, Looked east, looked west, looked south, looked north.

But no man saw, for I lay hid Securely; next he wildly chid His evil fortune, then a tree He mounted, and, O misery! Before mine eves a corpse he swang. While through mine ears his death cry rang And ringeth yet.

Dull, dead and cold My heart still turns, as I behold In memory's glass that awful day: Yet who shall rashly dare to say That he hath erred, whose one pure aim Hath been to shield from death and shame His sovereign Lord, and break the might Of bold rebellious men? XVII. The Fox well goes.

But Right
And Justice seem, alas! astray,
When I behold the unblushing way
In which these traitors, round their King
In Council seated, barefaced fling
At me proud scornful looks, while I
Am left,—despised and spurned,—to die!

"To save thy life, dear Lord, I let My own dear Father perish; yet Small thanks are mine. What other one Of all who stand around had run Such risks as fell to my sad lot? I pause—'tis vain—they answer not!"

While Reynard spake, a fierce desire
To win this treasure-hoard 'gan fire
The hearts of King and Queen, who cried:
"Nay, Reynard, wilt thou not confide
To us where this great storehouse lies?
Or wilt thou rashly dare despise
To gain our mercy through this good?"

Quoth Reynard: "Nay, then, by the rood! How should I tell so great a thing In face of traitors, who would bring My soul to death? Each man of them Would inly triumph, and contemn The Fox for one of slender wit."

"Nay! here we find occasion fit," Exclaimed the Queen, "to pardon all Thy past offences, and recall Thee to our Council, if but wise

And true thou provest."

Quick replies
The Fox: "Dear Lady, should my Lord
Of royal graciousness, afford
To me full pardon, and forgive
The past ill time, ne'er yet did live
Monarch on whom so rich a shower
Of wealth hath fallen, as shall dower
His crown withal: for as 'tis said,
The tale of stars that o'er us shed
Their influence, hath alone been told
By him who made them, so this gold
No mortal man can tell."

Then cried
The King: "Ah! Dame, would ye confide
In legends Reynard doth relate?
Saving your reverence, innate
It is with him to rob and lie,
And though for once he willed to try
Plain-spoken truth, so in his bone
Is falsehood grafted, and so grown
Within his flesh, that much I doubt
If aught can drive that foul fiend out."

Replied the Queen: "Nay, good my Lord, 'Twere well to trust the Fox's word, For though he showed so fell before, He now is changed, and will no more Lie, jape, or steal: we all have heard With what plain speech he hath preferred Against his nephew and his Father, Gross charge of crime, which he might rather Have laid on other beasts, if he Had mind to practise loselry."

Answered the King: "Great Dame, if thou 86

Wilt have it so, my mind shall bow
To thy desire, e'en though I thought
That my accord thereto were bought
By some great scathe that might befall
Myself or crown. Now hear men all:—
An oath I swear by that same crown,
And by my kingly ermined gown,
That should the Fox but once again
Misdo and trespass, I will rain
Such vengeance down on him, and those
Who own his lineage, that the crows,
And other carrion birds, shall feed
For years untold on all the breed
Of Foxes, and their race shall be
Destroyed till past the ninth degree."

Then Reynard fixed his eyes stoundmele Against the King's; such joy did feel His heart he scarce found voice to speak, But lastly, all subdued and weak, Said:

"Gracious Lord, he were not wise
Who strove with foolish japes and lies,
To cozen one whose wit acute
Hath long been held beyond dispute
Or question; thou for judgment sound
Art through the world's wide space renowned,
And shallow-pated must he be
Who strives in wit to master thee."

The King from off the greensward took A straw, with grave judicial look, Then said: "E'en brittle as this straw, I count that stern time-honoured law, Whereby thou art condemned to die For murder, theft and villainy.

See now, before thine eyes is broken In twain this straw, let that be token Of pardon for thy past misdeeds, And full oblivion for the redes Whereby thy Father sought to ruin Our noble state, and 'stablish Bruin On that illustrious throne where we Hold rule with peace and equity."

Once more fair hope began to buoy
The Fox's heart, which leapt for joy
To hear these words, and in his brain
Arose forthwith a brilliant train
Of bold-eyed fiction, which the King
Should blind and hoodwink, and the string
Of lies he told make seeming fair
In such degree, that Wolf and Bear,
Cast down from high estate, might prove
The woe of thraldom, while above
Their abject heads exalt, he might
As champion pose, of Truth and Right.





XVIII HOW THE FOX GAVE HIS THANKS TO THE KING 85 TOLD OF THE HIDING PLACE OF A GREAT TREASURE

THEN said he: "Gracious King and Queen, I praise my God that ye have seen It good, thus freely unto me To do such worship; heartily Thereof I thank ye, and will show What strong and grateful love doth glow Within my faithful breast: no King Holds rule within this wide world's ring Whose treasure-house shall equal thine; For that great wealth, which now is mine, To thee I freely give."

Then took
The Fox a straw in hand, with look
Of grave assurance: "Hold," quoth he,
"This straw, and know most certainly,
King Ermanric's great wealth henceforth
Is thine."

As though 'twere thing of worth The King received the straw, and threw It gaily from him—then there flew Across his face a joyous smile. The Fox laughed inwardly the while, For now the King gave ready ear To all his counsel, and in fear Stood many lest they fared but ill Beneath the Fox's crafty will. Then quoth he straight: "I prithee lend Attention while I bring to end The tale of how this treasure may,

89

Wolf's dread

XVIII. The For ages lost and hidden away. Yet once again be won by thee, Its destined Lord by Heaven's decree:

> "In Flanders, on the eastern side, A forest lies, deep, dense and wide, Known as the wild-wood Hulsterlo. Most drear it is, and round it blow Fierce howling winds, while near to it Rolls the black tide called Krekynpit. A lone and savage wilderness Is all this land, and dire distress Find those who wend therein: a year Oft flitteth by, when come anear To that sad spot nor man nor wife, Unless forwearied of their life.

"Keep well the name of Krekvnpit In memory's hold, for interknit Therewith is all the mystery Of where the precious hoard doth lie. Now prithee lend most careful ear The while I indicate a clear Unerring key by which to win The long-lost treasure that within The fosse lies hid. To me alone These mystic sentences are known:

K ing am I and master here, R ight o'er all this wealth I claim. E ach man who his life holds dear K noweth well to fear my name. Y ield before my might, O gates! N obel bids ye to obey, P owerful is the prince who waits, I am he who brooks no nay, T hink ye not to shun the fates; Bolts and bars away! away!

"These words thou thrice must boldly speak Whene'er the treasure-store ye seek, But go thou not alone the while, For as in that far distant isle
The three sweet-voiced Hesperides
Kept guard o'er golden fruit, so these
Drear lands wherein my toil hath piled
This golden hoard, are watched by wild,
Fierce demon sprites. Have therefore care
To choose some faithful friends to share
This dangerous questing, and thy Queen
Shall bear thee company, for ween
Ye well no stranger canst thou trust
In such emprise, but surely must
Thy very self set hand thereto.

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

"Now hearken further to the clue: Whene'er ye come to Krekynpit, Note where the lake in two doth split, Leaving a tongue of land between, With towering poplars well beseen: Then find two silver birchen trees. And search around the root of these Until ve see two small white stones, Graved with a skull and cross-laid bones. Then if ye six feet further follow, And stamp, an empty sound and hollow Shall greet thine ears: dig there, and ye, Six short feet down, a door shall see Made fast with curious bolts and locks, Contrived to overpass the shocks Of rage or rapine; thrice stamp hard, And speak the watchword—straight unbarred Shall be the door, stretched open wide, Which strongest spoilers had defied,

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care. And all the glorious glittering prize Lie bare before thy wondering eyes.

"My tongue forbeareth to repeat
The unheardof wealth that soon will greet
Thy ravished sight, for thou ere long
Wilt own that fable, tale, or song
Hath never told of aught so rare
As that thou ownest.

Yet more fair
Than all beside do I esteem
One marvel which the brightest dream
Hath never pictured, 'tis the crown
Of Ermanric, whose high renown
Still fills the world. Of purest gold
Deft dwarf hands forged it, in the old
And mighty days: wot well that this
Cost many a thousand mark, ywis,
For precious stones: around it stand
Storied, all deeds the King's right hand
Victorious wrought o'er land and sea,
Swaying the wide world mightily.

"This glorious work, the traitorous Bear Aspired as sovereign Lord to wear:— Vain futile dream!—Thy goodly head Shall o'er that crown new lustre shed.

"Dear Lord, when all this good is thine, And doth in radiant splendour shine Around thy throne, from brimming heart Thy voice shall cry: 'How true thou art, O Reynard Fox, whose subtle wit Won all this treasure, and with it Hast dowered thy King: God give to thee Fair fortune, wheresoe'er ye be.'"

"The King looked wondrous grave, and shook

His head—seemed deep in thought—then strook His beard, and said: "Thou, too, must come To point the weird and distant home"! Thy hands chose out for this great good; Who else can thread the intricate wood But thee alone? I oft have heard Of London, and a household word Is Paris: Acon and Cologne, For sacring rites and shrines are known To all who live, but Krekynpit Doth sound as though thy japing wit Had forged the name."

Of little good
These words to Reynard smacked, he stood
Dumfoundered, then with injured air
Turned on the King a haughty stare,
And cried, "My Lord, dost thou the way
Desire to know that leads from May
To Rome's great city? Dost thou dream
I'd lead thy steps towards Jordan's stream?
Your knowledge of the country's lie
Argues small wit in geography.
'Fore heaven I wot not what ye ween,
But when my witness thou hast seen,
Thy weening changed will be I trow."

Then with a calm unruffled brow,
He cried: "Stand forth, O Cuwaert Hare,
Before our gracious Lord, and bare
Thy soul of everything thou know'st—
Why gaze ye then as though a ghost
Arose to scare thee? Wherefore quake
Thy limbs thus wretchedly and shake
With trembling as thou wert acold?
Pluck up good heart, and speak with bold
Clear utterance, by the faith and troth

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

Ye owe the King; as on thine oath, I charge thee speak."

Then Cuwaert cried:

"Nay, trust ye well, although I died For speaking truth, I will not lie." Quoth Reynard: "Say then manfully, Know ye where standeth Krekynpit? Or is thy mind all blank of it?"

"Twelve years ago, I knew it well," The Hare replied, "a place most fell And lone it is: within a wood Named Hulsterlo it stands: small good Found ever woman, man, or child, In that obscure and lonesome wild. Sorrow and hunger, fear and cold, Past all that ever tongue hath told, I underwent in that drear spot. Some desperate men had cast their lot Therein with Father Symonet The Frisian, hoping thus to get Share in the villain coin he made, And by that base nefarious trade, Report gave out, that they and he, Caroused in jovial company. But that was ere the time I found Good fellowship with Ryn the hound, Who hath from many a danger saved My little life, and thereto braved The direst peril of his own. If he were here, most clearly shown 'Twould be by his true tongue, that I Ne'er trespassed 'gainst his Majesty."

"Enough!" exclaimed the Fox: "refrain All further words, and quick regain Thine home, thy fellowship and friends." Then turning towards the King: "this ends, I trust, my Lord, thy cruel doubt: Is not then all my tale without One blot or flaw?"

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

"Forgive, I pray,"
The King replied, "that so astray
Suspicion led me: now the road
I prithee lead toward where is stowed
The precious hoard."

"Dear King, I deem,"
Replied the Fox, "that strange 'twill seem
Should I the least reluctance show
To seek that good, but ye must know,
That thou behold'st in me a man
'Neath holy Church's curse and ban;
And therefore 'twould great censure bring
On thy most reverend name of King
If thou in company wert seen
With one accurst, and well I ween
'Twere grievous wrong should blur of blame
Sully thy pure and spotless name
Through my demerit. Hearken while
I tell the wretched tale, though vile
Perchance it make me in thine eyes.

"My condemnation did arise
After this manner: Isegrym
Was seized, long years past, with a whim
To wear the shackle of such vows
As monks are bound by, and to house
Himself within a Convent's walls,
'Neath shaven crown: but soon the calls
Of hunger caused him to repent,
And round the countryside he went,
Complaining that his death 'twould be
To stay within the monkery.

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

Although he day by day devoured As much good meat as would have dowered Six other monks with ample food. Yet stoutly swore he by the rood. That still he hungered, and complained That if the year through he remained Within the Cloister, he must die. This touched my tender heart, and I. As being near to him of kin, Advised that he no longer in The holy building should abide. Thereon he fled, and woe betide My wretched self; since then, accurst I wander o'er the land, athirst For Papal absolution; soon As breaks the morrow's dawn, that boon To seek, I take my way towards Rome, And, ere again I see my home, I must across the perilous sea Wend to the Holy Land, and ye Shall see my face no more until, The curse removed, I may fulful All tasks ye call on me to do.

"To fare to Krekynpit with you While 'neath the Holy Father's ban Would more dishonour bring thee than I dare give thought to: men would say Ten thousand evil things should they Behold thee wend with one whose state Is known for excommunicate."

The King said: "Since it seems ye stand Beneath the Church's curse, and banned, In virtue of the Pope's decree, The danger seemeth verily Supremely great, and might bring down Dishonour both on State and Crown, If I to Krekynpit should wend, Faring with thee as guide and friend. Twere doubtless better that I take Cuwaert as pilot, till ye make Your peace with Holy Church, and I Strict counsel give ye, that ye try To rid thee rathely of this curse."

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

"My Lord," exclaimed the Fox, "lest worse My state should grow, I straightway start Towards Rome, and having made depart, My foot shall tire not, day nor night, Until my soul, made pure and white, From sin's dark stain once more shall be Fit for thy kingly company."

"Reynard," the King replied, "I deem That now in goodly train ye seem Towards holy life: God give ye grace The path of penitence to trace, Till all fulfilled is thy desire To free thy soul from curse so dire."

Whene'er this parleying was done,
Raised on a high-built vantage-stone
King Nobel spake, with strict command,
That all the motley train should stand
Around the throne within a ring
Where sprang the fresh sweet grass, and bring
Themselves in order of estate
And birth. But foremost, and elate
In royal favour, Reynard stood
Without a blush beside the good
And gracious Queen, whom he, above
All others, had good cause to love.

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XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

Then spake the King: "All ve who here Stand round about, give careful ear To that I say. Or rich or poor, Or young, or those who near death's door. Must know, that in good days gone by, None in our counsels ranked more high Than Reynard Fox: until alas! In lapse of time it came to pass That he, by ill desires misled, Committed divers crimes, and fled The hand of Justice: taken and tried, Condemned and sentenced, he had died By hangman's hands: but all have heard How he, with plain straightforward word Hath laid all bare a fearful plot. And e'en hath hesitated not To charge therein his kin and friends. This have we counted full amends For trespass done, and hence the Queen, And we ourselves to mercy lean. And once more take him to our grace, Restored to fill his former place Within our Council, wherefore I Command that henceforth ve apply Your hearts in such wise as to give To him due worship, and to live With him, and all those beasts whom he Calls kin and friends, in amity.

"I charge, moreover, that ye pay Respect and honour every way To Reynard's wife and children, greet Them aye with deference, as is meet Toward those of rank.

Let no man dare Henceforward grievance to declare 98

Against the Fox.

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

"In former days
He hath misdone, but now betrays
Awakened conscience and deep woe
For ancient wrong, and fain would show
Henceforth how deeply penitence
Hath stirred his heart. He Romeward hence,
So soon as rays of morning break,
Will pass on pilgrimage, and take
No thought of rest until he win
The Pope's free pardon for the sin
Which mars his life.

Then o'er the sea,
Of peril heedless, fareth he
As pilgrim through the Holy Land,
And when his well-loved native strand
He once more treads, exempt from stain
Of sin, new life begin again."

The Raven Tyselin, who spoke But rarely, gave a boding croak, And leapt across the Court to where In parlance stood the Wolf and Bear, With Tybert Cat beside them: "Now What say ye caitiffs? for I trow," Quoth he, "your day henceforth is o'er; The King will list your plaints no more: Afar from Court may ye retire Now Reynard courtier is, and squire; In high esteem and favour great His sovereign holds him. Though of late Ye fondly hoped to overreach His plans, he may in turn impeach Your doings. While forgiveness free His trespass gains, the twain of ye

XVIII. The Wolf's dread care.

Are doomed for crime and treachery."

Cried Isegrym: "Think not that I Will credence give hereto, ye lie Sir Tyselin, bird of perjured throat."

"Not so," the Raven croaked, "ye dote, And dream half waked, ye foolish pair."

Then towards the King strode Wolf and Bear, While half in hiding Tybert Cat, In deadly fear and trembling, sat And listened: fain would he forgive Reynard his loss of eye to live In friendship with him now, for dread Shook him, lest hot resentment led His foe to do him mischief worse Than heretofore, and many a curse He poured on that ill day when Fate Brought him beneath the Fox's hate.



·XIX· HOW·THE·WOLF· &·
·THE·BEAR·WERE·ARREST:
·ED·BY·THE·LABOUR· OF·
·REYNARD· \$ \$

ITH haughty step across the field Stalked Isegrym, resolved to yield No jot to Reynard. To the Queen He gave mock thanks, though angry spleen Shone through each specious word he spake, The while he shaped his tongue to make Fresh charge of crime against the Fox.

Burst forth the King: "Thy treason shocks All sense of justice: dost thou think That vaunting speech can make me shrink From that stern duty which I owe To all my subjects? Learn to know That laws once 'stablished may not be Made nought of with impunity."

XIX. The Wolf's lost shoes.

The Marshals forthwith gave he charge That they no longer left at large Bruin or Isegrym. Ne'er yet Were rabid dogs more ill beset Than this sad twain. So fast and hard Their limbs were pinioned, as debarred Or rest or movement, while sharp pain Each joint endured; nor could they gain Relief by roaring. Through the night Thus lay they, nor did morning's light Assuage their wretchedness.

Hear now

How Reynard's envious heart did show Foul rancorous hate.

He firstly made
His suit before the Queen, that flayed
Might be so much of Bruin's hide
From off his back, as would provide
Himself a useful travelling scrip,
Of such good sort as might equip
A pilgrim Romeward bound, and asked
Moreover, seeing that he basked
In favour now, the right to choose
Whereso he list two pairs of shoes.

Then mark again what vengeful spite Was masked beneath this plea to dight His feet with travelling-gear. Quoth he:

XIX. The Wolf's lost shoes.

"Dear Queen, most needful 'tis to me That someone four good shoes should lend Of kind all pilgrims wear who wend To distant lands. Now Isegrym Hath four such shoes, and if from him I borrowed two, and then two more You gave me from the needless four Aunt Ersewyn wears (who loves her home So well that rarely doth she roam, And therefore hath but small excuse To keep two pair in constant use), Then would I, wending on my way, Thy soul's health make my matin lay, While, that ye meet no scathe or wrong, Should be my daily evensong: Before all else 'tis just and right Thy pilgrim should, both day and night, Assail the throne of Heaven with prayer To make thy soul its constant care, And grant that when ye pass from this Sad world ye find eternal bliss."

The Queen replied: "Dear Reynard, thou With wisdom speakest; well, I trow, Behoveth it that two good pair Of shoes ye gain before ye fare So far afield. To keep thy feet Safe, sound, and whole, 'twere more than meet Ye be well shod, for ye must pass O'er rocks and mountains, and, alas! By many a sharp and stony way; Therefore with firm assurance may Ye take one pair from Isegrym, And wherefore should ye not benym A pair from Ersewyn's feet, for those Will match your Uncle's? Evil blows

XIX. The Wolf's lost shoes.

The wind that carrieth nought of good To one or other, and though should The loss of shoes be loss to each Of life, yet you thereby would reach The pious end ye have in hand, Namely to gain the Holy Land With speed: despatch ye to engage In this most needful pilgrimage."



XX: HOW: ISEGYM: &: ERSE= ·WYN: MUST: SUFFER: THEIR: SHOES: TO: BE: PLUCKED: OFF &: HOW: THEY: WERE: DONE: ON TO: REYNARD: SESSESSE

UCHWISE did this false palmer trim His tale, that he from Isegrym Won two good shoes.

No fowl at roast,
Or victim lashed to whipping-post,
E'er lay or stood more helpless than
The wretched wolf: salt rivers ran
Adown his cheeks the while they haled
His claws from off his feet, nor failed
To lay the nerves and sinews bare,
Till red the life-blood flowed.

Like fare

Dame Ersewyn must befall: the claws Were reft from both her hinder paws As supine lay she on the grass With heavy cheer, and so, alas! Reynard hath gained what they have lost With dire misease, and cruel cost.

Then laughed the Fox, and scorning spake:

103

"Dear Aunt, much sorrow for my sake Thou now dost suffer: poignant grief I feel thereat, yet some relief It is to know that thou (whose fond And kindly love I prize beyond That of all beasts who claim to be Of kith or kin allied to me) Shalt freely that sweet pardon share In search of which I now must fare Across the sea, sustained by hope Of mercy from our Lord the Pope.

So woe was Ersewyn, weak and worn,
She scarce had voice to speak her scorn
And wrath of heart, but feebly said:
"Ah! Reynard, well thy spite hath sped
Thus far, yet trust I heaven will send
Such guerdon on thee, that thy end
May carry warning for all time,
That though unblushing fraud and crime
Prosper awhile, yet those who sow
The wind, the whirlwind's blast shall know."

Bruin and Isegrym kept peace: Reproachful words give little ease To tortured backs, or shackled limbs; Silent they lie, while anguish brims Their eyes with tears.

The wary Cat
Had disappeared, well judging that
Occasion given, small doubt it were
The fate 'neath which the Wolf and Bear
Now writhed, the Fox would put on those
Who, friends to them, must be his foes.

No sooner rose the morrow's sun, 104

Than, willing work so well begun To carry through, the Fox with grease Prepared his shoes, and ne'er did cease To laugh the while he dight his feet Therewith, then made all haste to meet The King and Queen, 'fore whom he came With merry cheer, devoid of shame Quoth he: "A fair good-morrow, Or blush. Great Lord and Dame, unflecked by sorrow, Befall ye both; your royal grace I dare beseech, ere yet I trace My pilgrim steps, for one boon more. 'Tis this: that as was used of yore, The Church's holy fellowship May bless the palmer's staff and scrip I bear from hence, for this would gain Me praise and honour, and I fain Beneath the Church's ward would wend.

The King exclaimed: "Ho! straightway send For Bellyn Ram," to whom quoth he: "Sir Bellyn, it behoves that ye For Reynard Fox should sing High Mass, Ere he on pilgrimage doth pass Across the sea. Scrip, shell and staff, Bless thou for him, on our behalf."

Replied the Ram: "An impious thing The Pope would count it, should I sing High Mass for one who 'neath the curse Of Holy Church lies bound, and worse Than death itself would hap to me."

Exclaimed the King: "That scarce can be! For, hath not Master Gelys said
That though a man his life had wed
105

XX. Rev-

To all the sins the world hath known, nard's far fare. Yet, when he once the priest hath shown Goodwill to mend, and vice forsake, Desiring earnestly to take The Church's precious Sacrament Of holy penance, and be bent By ghostly counselling to live, That God will pardon, and forgive His sins in gracious mercy? So When Reynard shows desire to go Across the perilous wide sea, Throughout the Holy Land, shall he Be not of all his sins made clear, To live in God's most holy fear?" Then answered Bellyn:

> "Gracious King, On thy good safeguard must I fling Myself, if I this office do, Or else with bitter tears might rue The pains which Bishop Prendelor Would deftly wield, should he before His dread Archdeacon Loosandbind Call me to answer, or else find That it behoved him to employ Sir Rapiamus, whose prime joy Centres in worrying humble clerks."

'It marks The King waxed wroth, and cried: Thee out least grateful among men, And proves thy churlish mind, that when But once for many a year I ask Of thee some light and simple task, Then straightly fall ye to excuse The debt ye owe me, and abuse My kindly nature: sooner I 106

Would hang than urge thee to comply With evil grace."

XX. Reynard's far fare.

When Bellyn saw
The King thus wroth, the Church's law
He clean forgat, and quook with fear—
Then to the Altar drew anear,
And having sung with solemn voice
His Mass, from holy books made choice
Of portions opportune to read
O'er Reynard.

Marvellous small heed He set thereby, except that it Told to his weal and benefit That thus 'twas 'fore all eyes made known How much was he in worship grown.

When Bellyn Ram had duly sung His Mass devoutly through, he hung Around the Fox's neck the scrip Late cut from Bruin's hide. "Now grip," Quoth he, "this palster straight and stout, And so thou art, beyond all doubt, Right well arrayed thy voyage to take."

Most woful cheer did Reynard make
As came he towards the King, and feigned
As though his eyelids scarce refrained
From bitter tears: but no worse smart
Distressed, in truth, his crafty heart
Than keen vexation, that hard fare
(Equal to that which Wolf and Bear
Endured) some others had escaped,
Yet nevertheless his face he shaped
As worn with grief, and faltering spoke
With sobs, as though each word would choke
His utterance: "All good people pray

107

For my lone soul when far away
From home and friends, as I for ye
Will duly tell my rosary."
E'en while he glozed, the Fox would fain
Begone from thence, for guilt's dark stain
Lay on his soul, and well he knew
What stern requital was his due.

"Dear Reynard," quoth the King, "I grieve Sorely ye take such hurried leave Of those who love thee': prithee stay Till night once more gives place to day."

Quoth he: "Dear King, the time is ripe That I should Romeward wend, to wipe Away the Church's ban, and wage War with the fiend in pilgrimage."

"May God go with thee," cried the King: And all those beasts, who in the ring Stood crowding round, he straight decreed Should lend their aid the Fox to speed With strictest safeguard on the way.

Alack for Wolf and Bear, who lay Fast bounden, while dared no man seek To salve their wounds, or even speak Them kindly words.

Oh! had ye seen
How Reynard boldly trod the green
And fragrant turf, with mincing gait,
Of mien most grave, albeit elate,
With wallet, staff and shoes equipped,
Ye sore had laughed: no bride e'er tripped
To Church in daintier sort than he
Showed now to all men, outwardly.

Then crowed his heart with joy to think That men who strove to make him drink, But that same morn, Death's bitter cup, Were even those who now bore up His name in honour, and the King, Whose wrath had been the masterstring Of all his actions, so was fooled By cunning flattery, and o'erruled By greed of gain, that now was bent His will to suit his foe's intent! Oh Reynard! Fox of double face, True pilgrim wert thou of deuce ace!

He loudly cried: "My Lord, I pray Ye come no further on the way Whither my steps tend, lest some harm Befall thereby: no small alarm I feel lest those two traitors, who Now lie in durance, might to you Work grievous ill, by treacherous plot Shouldst thou wend hence, for well I wot Their cunning schemes.

Therewith he stood
On hinder legs erect: "My good
Dear King and friends," quoth he, "a great
And precious pardon doth await
My soul at Rome: if ye will be
Partners of equal share with me
Therein, let orison and prayer
Besiege kind Heaven, to make its care
Your faithful pilgrim."

"Rest," cried they,
"Sure of our prayers, both night and day."

Then turning round his face, he bade

The King a last adieu: so sad And doleful looked he, that but few Stood by who felt not pity's dew Bestream their cheeks. Then quickly he Cried out with merrier cheer: "I see Two dear friends close at hand who might Attend my steps, and thus make bright And cheerful, long and toilsome fare. Dear Bellyn Ram and Cuwaert Hare. We ever staunch good friends and true Have been since earliest breath we drew: Through all the ills and woes of life. No angry words, or bickering strife Have ever torn our souls, nor e'er Your tongues have plained on me, but fair And evenhanded have ye been. Right virtuous, pure, and well beseen Moreover, is your mode of living, A notable example giving To other beasts of ghostly life; Your hearts know nought of angry strife Or envious hate; ye hanker not For flesh, but simple grass, I wot, And tender leaves, are all ye need. Ah! once, from worldly longings freed, Such diet was my daily use When lived I as a poor recluse In hope of heaven."

With such fair words
Of flattery, he these twain, like birds,
Hath taken in his fowler's net
Of wily speech: and so they let
Him guile them, till they stood before
Malperdy's dark and treacherous door.



XXI HOW CUART THE HARE WAS SLAIN BY REYNARD THE FOX S

HITHER arrived, the Fox exclaimed:

"Dear Bellyn, though in truth ashamed
To stay my journey, yet great need
I have of Cuwaert's help to speed
Some private matters; rest thou here
The while we enter; much I fear
That taking leave of Ermelyne
Will be a sad, heart-breaking scene,
When she perceiveth that I bear
The scallop shell, and pilgrim gear;
And Cuwaert, in her sore distress,
May speak sweet words of gentleness
To solace her."

The Ram replied:
"Nay, rest assured I will abide
Thy rathe return with ready heart,
I see it wrings thy soul to part
Thus quickly, and devoutly pray
That Cuwaert's kindly comfort may
Assuagement bring to Ermelyne.

And thus with guileful speech 'tis seen How Reynard lured the simple Hare Within his Castle.

Found they there
Dame Ermelyne and her cublings twain.
Scarce could her eyes from tears refrain

Of joy at Reynard's safe return. Small wonder that her heart should burn With anxious fear, lest gaol or death Her partner held, but now a breath Of deep relief she drew, yet saw With marvel that his dexter paw A palster held, the while a scrip Of bearskin, slung across his hip, He carried: short and quick, she said, "Oh! tell, dear Reyner, hast thou sped? And wherefore then this strange attire?" Quoth he: "Thou'dst judge me for a liar Should I set forth the exciting tale Of prison and judgment—but a veil Shall rest thereon—yet must thou know Some news of moment: forth I go On pilgrimage far oversea. Nathless, with will to honour me, Our gracious Lord in pledge hath ta'en The Wolf and Bear, who safe remain In bondage, till once more I come Unscathed to my beloved home. Beyond this boon, a further debt I owe the King. With deep regret I needs must tell you that the Hare, Towards whom such kindly love we bare, Was first, by witness of the King, Among those men who dared to bring Foul charge against me, therefore he Is freely ours, and freely we With him may deal: by life and troth I feel my kindly heart wax wroth With such a traitor."

When he heard This oath, quick fear and anguish stirred The victim's breast, who fain had fled, But, 'twixt the gate and him, with dread Ferocious aspect, Reynard stood, And cried: "O traitor! nought but blood Can expiate thy many crimes Against me wrought in bygone times."

XXI. Cuwaert's sad fate.

Loud screamed the Hare: "Ho! Bellyn! aid, Ere this false pilgrim Fox hath made A victim of thy friend."

Small care Had Reynard of his cries, but tare With ravenous teeth his throat atwo; Then grinned: "Ha! ha! how kindly blew The wind that brought this timorous beast Within our borders—dainty feast We one and all of him may make, And having eaten well, will slake Our thirst with blood—right heartily I thank our noble Lord that he Hath blessed our board with generous cheer; Feast we to-day devoid of fear, And if the King hath aught to say In reprobation of the way In which I've entertained the Hare, With lightsome hearts will we prepare To face the worst—no single snap Of fingers care I what may hap!

Quoth Ermelyne: "Ye but mock, I trow, And beg that ye will tell me how, Unscathed, thou didst escape from Court, And wherefore did the Hare escort Thy footsteps hither."

Quoth he: "Dame, From deadliest foe, the King became My warmest friend, for so I plied

I

His ear with flattering tales, that died Within his breast the cruel hate He lately bore me, and as great Became his love: but quickly, thin As frailest webs that spiders spin, His friendship yet will wax, I fear, If he through some kind friend should hear How Cuwaert happed to meet his death: Then doubtless would he waste his breath In oaths profane, and vows to check My course, and put around my neck A cord.

Methinks 'twere well to steal From forth this spot, ere yet we feel His kindling ire, and strive to find Some countryside, where heaven is kind In giving plenteous food, and we May pass our life days jollily. I know a woodland, not far hence, Where shadowing trees and thickets dense Afford good shelter, and the air Is sweet and healthful past compare. Seven years 'twill serve us. Many a pheasant, Partridge, and woodcock, will those pleasant Green alleys give us: shady dells Are there, where bubble crystal wells Of freshest water, and thereout Ofttimes may we a spotted trout, Scoop up with nimble paw: Ah! God! What joyous days, despite the rod The King holds o'er us, may we spend In that sweet solitude, and end Our lives there, void of fear and woe. Truth is, the King hath let me go Because I led him to believe That he might wondrous wealth achieve

114

From out a fosse at Krekynpit (A place that lives but in my wit), By digging thence unheard-of treasure. We scarce need doubt, that past all measure Will rage his anger when the truth Flashes across him—then forsooth He'll hunt my life with most extreme And deadly hate: ye well may deem That many a bold and barefaced lie I had to forge, and many a sly, Well rounded tale must needs invent Before his stern resolve was bent From my destruction unto that Of my delators. Tybert Cat Hath fled away, and Bruin Bear, With Isegrym the Wolf, doth share The dreary prison lately mine. Peril and death no longer twine About my footsteps: wot ye well That having freed me out that hell Of woe, small lust have I to come Therein again. Now once my thumb Is safely drawn from out the mouth Of our most gracious Lord, no drouth Feel I to thrust therein my head."

"Ah! Reyner dear," Dame Ermelyne said, "My counsel is we wander not From out this forest; well we wot, In this our ancient home, each hole And all its windings; each tree bole Some friendly landmark points: its night Hath no more terror than the light Of fair-eyed day, and therefore I Give earnest counsel we should try No unexplored and stranger-land.

Here have we subject 'neath our hand What thing soe'er our hearts desire. What Baron dares to boast of higher Or more established rank than thou Among our neighbours? Sweet, I trow, And pleasant is our ancient home, And, though our Lord the King should come On slaughter bent, and lay his siege Around us, dost thou deem our liege Could work us harm? Consider ve How many crossing-holes there be, And secret by-paths, ways, and tracks Known well to us, the while he lacks The wit to follow in and out Their dædal turnings; much I doubt That ever he will find his way Herein; but one thing sore dismay Doth cause within my loving heart, To wit—that thou must soon depart Far oversea."

Loud laughed the Fox, Then cried: "Dear Ermelyne, it shocks Me much to find that thou so ill Hast learned my practice: forthwith still Thy fear of this far faring; pray, Dost thou believe I must away Forth on this pilgrimage, because I spin a fable thin as gauze To blind the dull-eyed King? Dear Dame, Set nought thereby: no spark of shame Have I for broken vows. I knew of old (whose wit outran A thousand others) oft declared That he from perjury's guilt was spared Who took a forced bydwongen oath Pressed on, that is, to one that's loth,

116

And, as the vow was pressed on me, To make a pilgrim-voyage o'er sea To distant lands, against my will, Small purpose have I to fulfil The oath I sware. 'Twould not avail To me the worth of one cat's tail To follow out this pilgrimage, And therefore will to your most sage And prudent counsel give good heed. What care I though the King should speed His hosts against us? Here abiding, And in our fastnesses confiding, We need not fear what strength or might Can work against us, but will fight Brute force by subtle wiles. Unkind Were Fortune's hand could we not find (When I unpin my pack of wares) Good means to foil the King's weak snares. If harm he seeks, by Heaven, I vow That ne'er on any man till now Did such a storm of ruin break, As that 'neath which his throne shall shake."

Now, while this murderous meal and chat Went forth inside, impatient sat Bellyn without, and lastly grew Impatience into anger: "You Long needless parleying hold," he cried, "Dost then suppose that nought beside I have to do, but loiter here And wait your pleasure? Doth a mere Adieu take all this time to say? Why, in the Devil's name, I pray, Doth Reynard keep you?"

This boisterous call, with gentle word

117

Came Reynard forth, and softly said: "Dear Bellyn, prithee be not led To use harsh words towards thy friend Good Cuwaert Hare; he doth but spend Brief space in comforting his Aunt, Whose loving mind grim fear doth haunt She ne'er shall see her husband more. Dost deem it fitting thou therefore Shouldst thus be wroth? 'Tis his desire That forward go ye, while her dire O'erwhelming grief he strives to assuage With kindly comfort; I engage His flying foot will soon o'ertake Thy sober pace. 'Twould surely make Thy tender heart to bleed, if thou Shouldst see the anguished grief that now Bows down my wife to think that I Must wend as pilgrim."

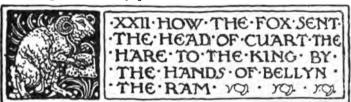
"Verily,"
Quoth Bellyn, "When I called, I thought
That Cuwaert cried for help, and sought
To know what ailed him."

"Did ye fear,"
Exclaimed the Fox, "that evil cheer
Had fallen on Cuwaert 'neath my roof?
That would indeed be sharp reproof
To my most hospitable house,
Wherein, I trust, the meanest mouse
Were safely sheltered. Hear ye then
The sad and simple story: when
Entering, I told dear Ermelyne
That we must part, ye well may ween
What sorrow seized her: straight she fell
In deathlike swooning: surely well
Might Cuwaert cry for aid, and he
Shrieked therefore: "Bellyn, help thou me."

The Ram made answer: "Sore afraid Was I, when thus he cried for aid, That Cuwaert suffered grievous harm."

XXI. Cuwaert's sad fate.

"Good friend," the Fox cried, "no alarm Thou needst to feel for one who stays Beneath my roof-tree: it would raise Shame in my breast if I the life, E'en of my children or my wife, Accounted holier than the guest Who deigns 'neath my poor cot to rest."



THEN quoth he further: "Bellyn, pray
Rememberest thou how yesterday
The King and Council gave command
That ere I left my native land
My special care should be to send
To him two letters? Ready penned
Behold them in my hands; wilt thou
Take charge of them?"

"Shall I, then, trow,"
Quoth Bellyn, "that by thee were writ
These letters? Though I knew thy wit
Surpassing good, I never wist
That so adroitly thou couldst twist
Thy hand to such rare work; 'twill fill
My soul with joy to aid thy will;
But cursed by evil hap I lack

TIO

XXII. Bellyn A proper mail wherein to pack runs post. Epistles fit to please the King."

Quoth Reynard: "Such a trifling thing As that shall be no hindrance, see The famous scrip which purposely The King bade work from Bruin's hide: To none of all my friends beside Thyself I'd trust it: safe therein Will ride the letters writ to win Worship and praise from our good Lord." Quoth Bellyn: "Nought could else afford My heart such joy as this great trust."

Straight Reynard sped indoors, and thrust Within the scrip sad Cuwaert's head: Forth came again, and lightly said, With cheerful visage: "Let me deck With this fair scrip thy well-formed neck; But wouldst thou love and friendship gain From those who rule at Court, abstain From reading that it holds, and if Ye deem our gracious Lord seem stiff And formal with you, well ye might Tell him your hand 'twas did endite The letters twain, and by your rede And solemn counsel were agreed The well-weighed matters found therein: And thereby shalt thou doubtless win The Royal favour."

Waxed right glad The simple Ram, assured he had Rare chance of credit, thanks, and praise.

Quoth he: "How greatly 'twill amaze The King and Court to learn that I Can read and write so skilfully.

XXII. Bellyn runs post.

And though, in truth, thereof I know No jot, yet oft it happeth so, That God's good wisdom doth permit Some men, possessed of little wit, By means of simple trick or fraud, To gain their neighbours' meed and laud For work or sapience not their own: The truth hereof will soon be shown By my example. Tell me though, Dear Reynard, shall not Cuwaert go To witness my success at Court?"

Quoth Reynard: "He doth now exhort His Aunt to patience, saying she Should dry her tears: 'twould, therefore, be Well that ye part alone. Beside, I must in private speech confide To Cuwaert some most subtle things."

Sped Bellyn forth, as though the wings Of that gold-fleecèd Ram he wore, Who, long days past, to Colchis bore Young Phryxus through the air.

Midday

Was barely past before where lay
The full Court came he, and the King
Much marvelled when he saw him bring
Again the scrip but lately made
From Bruin's fell: awhile he stayed
In silent wonder lost, then cried:
"Whence come ye, Bellyn? wherefore tied
About your neck is that same scrip
Which Reynard's suit availed to clip
From off the back of Bruin Bear?
And tell us on your honour, where
Is now the Fox."

XXII. Bellyn runs post.

"Whate'er I know. Great Lord, most gladly will I show," Replied the Ram: "at your command I went with Cuwaert hand in hand. To Reynard's house: elapsed short space, When said he: 'Haste thou to retrace Thy steps, dear Bellyn; wilt thou take Two letters for our liege Lord's sake?' 'Nay,' quoth I, 'by my hopes of Heaven, Most gladly would I carry seven To please our Lord;' forthwith brought he This scrip, wherein, as you may see, Are two epistles, writ with care, In whose inditing goodly share My hand is proud to claim: I trow That having read them, ye'll allow That ne'er with subtler craft and skill Were letters framed."

"It is our will," The King replied, "that Bochart read These letters; knoweth he at need All manner languages."

The Cat
Untied the scrip, while Bellyn sat,
Proudly, with all-expectant eyes.
Judge then his horrorstruck surprise,
When Bochart drew forth Cuwaert's head,
And cried: "Alas! behold this dread
And ghastly sight!"

The King exclaimed:
"By Heaven! my wisdom lies ashamed
That e'er my kindly heart believed
This villain Fox, who hath deceived
Our credence grossly."

Then was seen
Of all men, how the King and Queen
122

XXII. Bellyn runs post.

Were sick at heart, and grief so deep Assailed their Lord, that all the heap Of Courtiers held their breath afeard: Till lastly he, with head upreared, Sent forth a loud and bitter cry That seemed to shake the very sky, And such deep terror spread around That none dared speak, but stood as bound By magic spell.

The King's near sib,
The Pard, Sir Fyrapeel, with glib
And fearless words was first to speak;
Quoth he: "Great Lord, it shows but weak
For thee to sorrow madding-wise,
As though the Queen were dead, arise,
And show thyself of nobler cheer.
Art thou not King? Do not all here
Submit to thy unbounded sway?

The King made answer: "Truth ye say, Sir Leopard, but this subtle shrew, This born deceiver, doth imbrue His hands in blood unchecked, and show Such reckless spirit that scarce I know Where wisdom mastereth wrath. My friends, The Wolf and Bear, to serve his ends Have I foredone, and now most sore Remorse doth rack me that, before My best and noblest Barons, I Gave my belief implicitly To this deprayed and worthless Fox. 'Tis through my wife that all these mocks And japes befall me; ne'er I wot Hath man good sterling counsel got From woman, since our Mother Eve, Her trusting husband did deceive

runs post.

XXII. Bellyn In Eden's bowers with foolish prate. Now clearly I perceive, too late, That grossly have I been befooled, Letting my judgment be o'erruled By intercession of my wife, And through her vain advice my life Is spoiled and wasted: shamed will stand My name henceforth, throughout the land.

> "What though," replied Sir Fyrapeel, "Thou hast herein misdone, I feel Assured that thou ere long canst take Such vigorous order, that 'twill make Amends in full to those misused. All past offence would stand excused By Isegrym and Bruin Bear And Ersewyn if ye let them share (To compensate for shoes and skin) Bellyn, and all his kith and kin, For evermore: with plainest breath The Ram declared that Cuwaert's death Was his contrivance, therefore he Deserves to abide the penalty. And passing this, I give ye rede, Delay no moment, but with speed Let one and all go forth to fetch This murderous Fox, condemned as wretch That hath no further claim on law, And hang him straightway; this will draw All hearts to thee in full content— My bolt is shot—my counsel spent."



·XXIII HOW BELLYN THE A RAM; & ALL HIS LINEAGE A WERE GIVEN INTO THE HANDS OF ISEGRYM & BRUIN & HOW HE WAS SLAIN 20 120 120

"VITH ready heart," the King replied,
"I list this rede, and straight confide
To thee, Sir Fyrapeel, the charge
To comfort, soothe, and set at large
The prisoners, whom 'tis clear that I
Condemned to bonds too hastily."

Quick-footed, towards the dungeon took Sir Fyrapeel his road, and strook From off the limbs of Wolf and Bear Their manacles, and cried: "A fair And ample pardon doth the King Award ve; straightly doth it wring His royal heart with bitterest woe, To think his wit hath wandered so From wisdom's path, as once to trow The tale this base Fox told, but now With heart afire doth he repent His folly, and through me hath sent Strongest assurance of his love. And earnest purpose, that above Your former state shall ye be set In highest honour, till his debt Of restitution be apaid. Moreover, Bellyn Ram is made Your dower in fee, with all his kin; Henceforward free from taint of sin His lineage ye may drive and slay,

XXIII. The Ram's checkmate.

Harry and bite, till dooming day Crack o'er the world.

Ye both may hunt Moreover Reynard, till the brunt Of sharpest vengeance he hath felt, And all his kindred have been dealt Measure and mark of crime's reward.

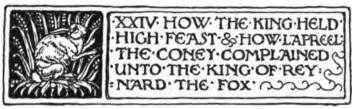
"The King's great bounty doth accord
This goodly grant and grace to you
In faith that ne'er will ye misdo
Against his realm, but lieges be
With homage, faith, and fealty.
Hail, then, with grateful thanks the rede
I give, and rolling years shall breed
New honours, whence all honours spring."

Thus did the noble Leopard bring To happy end and good success His mission. But most dire distress Fell on the wretched Bellyn, who Forewent his life: nor after knew His kindred peace, for Wolf and Bear Held chartered right and power to share Betwixt them all the ovine race, In whatsoever time or place Occasion haps, and ne'er have they Found respite since that fatal day.

The King, to show new love and care
For Isegrym and Bruin Bear
Above all other beasts, the Court
Commanded to the fields, where sport
And cheerful joyance filled the hours
Twelve days and nights; the woodland bowers
And upland plains with pipe and song

Resounded, while the merry throng, Forgetting grief and woe and pain, Rejoiced that Heaven smiled once again; For sorrows past are soon forgot By beasts and men alike, God wot!

XXIII. The Ram's checkmate.



O this most glorious feasting came Each beast and bird, to which a name Was given when erst beneath the shade Of Eden's sinless groves arrayed, Adam, uncursed, beheld them: ne'er Since man's dread fall, till now, had care So fled their hearts, and made them light And joyous as that first sweet night They knew existence. Soul entranced To merry piping shawms they danced The stately hovedance, timed with beat Of faultless rhythmic touch: all feet That twinkled there knew well the pleasure Of perfect cadence fallen to measure That now sunk low, and now swelled high From out the storm of minstrelsy. Unsparing tables well ordained Were freely piled; fair plenty reigned Unchecked, and reptile, bird, and beast Avowed that ne'er before a feast So full and bounteous eye had seen. Then, banquets ended, on the green, They, stretched at ease in careless rows,

XXIV. Joy rules the Host. Regaled their eyes with rarest shows, While music's murmur, like a sea, Brake on their ears unceasingly. Well may the hearts of all men long To see such pageants, hear such song Yet once again; but now no more Like festals reign; their time is o'er.

The only beast that held aloof
Was Reynard Fox; beneath his roof,
Unheeding, lay he wait to do
New harm or mischief; well he knew
Small welcome could he hope to find
With that good King, whose trusting mind
His lies had treacherously betrayed.

Hear once again how he displayed Good will towards his fellows.

When
The feast had dured eight days, in ken
Of all the joyful throng appeared
Lapreel the Coney (as it neared
The stroke of noon), all out of breath
He gasped, as one who barely death
Hath 'scaped, and falling down before
The King and Queen, cried: "I implore,
Great Lord, that thou to my complaint
Give gracious ear, while I attaint
Reynard the Fox of treacherous crime,
Marring this happy restful time
Of peace and joyance.

Yester morn,
So soon as night's dark veil was torn
From day's bright eyes, I came, with will
To reach thy Court, o'er yonder hill
Where Reynard's castle rears its head.

He stood without the gate, and said, With pious air, his beads; a gown Of pilgrim form he wore, and down His eyes were cast, with studious look, Seeming to read some holy book. Noting him thus engaged, I thought To pass him by unharmed, and sought To speak him fair, so gently said, 'Good-morrow, Reynard;' but instead Of kindly answering word, he raught His right foot forth, and therewith caught Me such a blow 'twixt eyes and ears, As wellnigh stunned me; blinding tears Suffused my sight, while terror-tost My soul was, lest I forthwith lost My head; but, God be thanked, so light And nimbly flits my foot, that right Across the path I sprang, and fled, Yet barely 'scaped his claws—a thread My life had hung upon—then he, With grinning scowl, snarled angrily. Nor void of reason was my fear. For as all men may see, one ear Alone is left me, and four holes, In girth as great as barley boles, His claws have riddled through my head; So deep the wounds are, and they bled So fast, that nigh aswoon I fell, Yet leapt forth sharply, or you well May judge no Lapreel had to-day Stood here to tell his tale; away I ran, nor stayed my course until Betwixt us lay yon towering hill.

XXIV. Joy rules the Host.

"Dear King, of tender pity, grant That ere the sun doth fall aslant

129

K

XXIV. Joy rules the Host. The mountains, thy command shall fetch Forth from his lair this murderous wretch, For, he at large, no man can go In safety o'er the heath, or know Good peaceful days: this treacherous shrew But lives new schemes and plots to brew."



·XXV· HOW· CORBANT·THE·
·ROOK· COMPLAINED· ON THE·
·FOX·FOR·THE· DEATH· OF· 90
·SHARPBECKE· HIJ· WIFE· 20

O sooner Lapreel's tale was ended, Than through the summer sky descended The purple-plumaged Corbant-Rook: His beak stood wide, his feathers shook With wild excitement, while he cried: "The Fox most grossly hath defied Thy peace, great Lord, and swift redress I claim against his frowardness. But yester morrow forth I went, With Sharpbecke, spouse beloved, intent On frolic mirth and joyous play, To ramble o'er the heath: there lay Reynard, as though death's cold hand bound His limbs—like any caitiff hound. His glazed eyes stared, his lolling tongue, From out his mouth, all listless hung: And Sharpbecke, filled with pity, said: 'Ah! well-a-day! the Fox is dead!'

"All round about his body we With tearful eyes searched carefully To note some certain sign of death.

XXV. The Rook's great woe.

As last resort, to test his breath. Sharpbecke, with tender love, her ear Laid close beside his mouth: no fear Or doubt had she, but that misfell In grievous wise, for, woe to tell! The felon Fox did only wait His time, and she alas! too late Beheld her danger, for he caught Her head and bit it off; distraught With horror, loud I shrieked, and cried: 'Ah! would to Heaven that I had died For thee, dear wife, alas! alas! That such a fearful scene should pass Beneath mine eyes.' Then instantly He leapt afoot and ran at me, Scowling so murderously, that fear Of death shook all my plumes, but near The spot there haply stood a tree Where refuge sought I hastily. And thence, with heartstrings torn, I saw The murderer fill his ravenous maw With Sharpbecke's corse: a cynic grin His face bore while he slonked her in. Till flesh and feathers, beak and bone, Had disappeared. With many a groan I watched him feast, until he went Back to his lair: then, worn and spent, And whelmed with grief, adown I flew, And gathered up, to bear to you, The few poor plumes his greed had left. I sat awhile as one bereft Of life: a thousand marks would be. Though coined of gold of Araby, Sum all too small to tempt again My spirit to undergo such pain And peril. Sorely doth it irk

XXV. The Rook's great woe. My soul to show the piteous work This caitiff wrought. If thou wouldst praise And worship gain, and happy days Of peaceful rest, 'tis thine to inflict On Reynard Fox a vengeance strict And lasting. No man then would dare To lightly heed the sword ye bear, Or hold your safeguard in despite; Else surely nor by day or night Shall Lord or Liege in safety go Along the highway, to and fro As need impells them. Mighty Lords Should rule in such wise as affords Safety to all: they much misdo Who heed not this, and sore shall rue Their slackness lastly, when they be Found partners of foul felony Which duty called their hands to hold In check with firmest grasp. O'erbold Perchance ye count me, when I pray Thou keep thy foot in virtue's way."



·XXVI HOW THE KING ·WAS·WRATHFUL AT· ·THESE COMPLAINTS:I

ING Nobel's wrath was throughly stirred When thus, alike from beast and bird, Rose new complaints of outrage done By Reynard Fox: as fire doth run Through carded flax, so ran the spark Of anger through his veins, and dark His visage lowered, while shook his limbs.

E'en as a boiling pot o'erbrims And spits and hisses, so he burst Wellnigh with fury, swore and curst All those around him, while his eyes Shot fire as forth from leaden skies Forked lightning glances: loud he brayed As roars a furious bull; affrayed Thereat were all his Court, and quoke With deadly fear. At last he spoke With voice of thunder: "By my life, And by the troth I owe my wife, And by my crown, I vow and swear That now the law's strong arm, laid bare, Shall strike the Fox such deadly blow That henceforth all the world shall know To dread my vengeance; and in times Far distant, through all lands and climes My wrath shall still be told. O'ernice Was I to let the Fox entice Me thus so lightly to receive His words for gospel and deceive My practised ear with lying speech Of how as pilgrim he would reach Rome and the Holy Land; what touch Of falseness guides his tongue to smutch And hide the truth! Oh, wilv Fox. That thus can stuff thy sleeve with flocks! But out alas! the font and spring, Of all these foolish acts, which bring To me disgrace, I count the Queen, 'Twas her weak womanish rede I ween That spared the Fox. But not the first Am I who bent his ear to curst Jezebel Weak prate of woman. Brought Ahab down to very Hell By ill advice; Macbeth did slay

Good Malcolm, Scotia's King, astray
Led by his wife; and thousands more
Of men have rued the day with sore
Repentance, that a woman's tongue
Was suffered weight to bear among
Their counsels. Now do I command
And pray all nobles of the land
Who hold of me, and have desire
To keep my friendship, that they fire
Their hearts and minds to wreck this great
Unheard-of trespass, and abate
This murderer's power, that henceforth we
May live our days out peaceably
In wealth and worship: forward go
Our banners till the Fox lies low."

When Isegrym and Bruin heard With what stout speech the King upstirred All men against the Fox, they grew In hope that shortly vengeance due They might upon their foeman take, But dared no accusation make For very dread: at last the Queen, With stately port, and noble mien, Calm words of reason spake in French, Hoping thereby his wrath to quench: "Sire, pour Dieu ne croye toutes choses Qu'on vous dise, ni vous dispose A jurer legèrement, a man Of worship should not curse and ban Till all the matter doth appear Past doubt or question, fair and clear; I prithee calm the unreasoning ire Thy words betray: as King and Sire Of those who bend before thy throne, Thou shouldst not let thy oaths be sown

Broadcast and heedlessly around. But give each question most profound And careful thought: at last when plain The whole is made, 'tis thine amain Thy course to steer betwixt the two Who claim a hearing, giving due And careful thought to try which one Of rival suitors hath misdone Against his neighbour: oft it haps That he who plains hath made the lapse, And Audi alteram partem is A proverb writ in gold vwis: As such it should for ever be Shrined in a judge's memory. Tis true I held the Fox for good And loval, therefore 'twas I stood His friend, and time may prove him just. Thou deem'st he has betrayed my trust; But whether he prove or good or ill, I trow thy kingly worship still Were best assured didst thou proceed With care and caution, giving heed To each nice point. Such seems to me The unblemished path of equity. 'Tis clear that howsoe'er ye shape Your judgment, scarce may Reynard 'scape Your hands, but must forthwith obey Thy will, although at last ye slay Or bind him fast."

Quoth Fyrapeel:
"Dear Lord, methinks the Queen doth deal
Herein with subtle wit, and ye
May safely do that thing which she
Now counsels. But 'twere well to call,
In solemn conclave, one and all
Of those ye count for just and wise:

Should their united wits advise
That Reynard's guilt is clear, all doubt
Ends, and at once may ye, without
More question, hang him: but though he
Were twice the thief and shrew that we
Account him, yet my counsel 'twere
He nathless should enjoy a fair
And patient trial, and aright
Be judged."

"Sir Fyrapeel, we quite Agree," quoth Isegrym, "to this, Seen, it displeaseth not, ywis, Our gracious King: just, fair, and good Thy speech is, but if Reynard stood Here, and could prove that he were thrice As clear of every crime and vice As child new christened, I could yet Show deeds as foul as e'er have met Desert on gibbet. Thus his life Is forfeit to the cord or knife Of outraged justice. Nought I say Thereof, but calmly wait the day Of his appearing. This one thing Note well: the Fox hath told the King Of wondrous treasure-hoards below The ground, far off at Hulsterlo. Near Krekynpit. No bolder lie Hath ever yet been forged by The father of all untruth, yet he With bold unmatched effrontery, Beguiled the King's belief, and sore And cruel racking pains therefore Have fallen on me and Bruin Bear: Yet mark! my very life I dare To stake, that not the smallest word Is true that rounds the tale we heard

136

Told by this perjured thief.

XXVI. King Nobel raves.

E'en now
He pills and plunders men who go
Bypast his house across the heath.
Nathless, Sir Fyrapeel, beneath
Thy wit and our good King's desire
I bow me; all that ye require
Must needs have place. If will were his
To heark the King's command, ere this
The Fox had come, but each behest
He laughs to scorn, as though a jest
Or jape he counted it."

Then said The King: "Now swear I by my head That furtherforth no envoys wend To this false Fox, nor will I spend More words or threats, but straight ordain To all true men whose hearts are fain To help their King, that ere six days Are past, by divers roads and ways, They come with bombards, guns and bows, Both horse and foot in serried rows, To march, whene'er their Lord and Liege Sends summons forth, and straight besiege Malperdy's height; a solemn vow I make herewith: ere seaward go But seven day's suns, will I root out Reynard the Fox, lest men should doubt If he or I be King.

Ye sires
And noble lords, in whom the fires
Of truth and loyal faith burn bright,
Speak forth if lust ye have to fight
In this just cause."

The summer air

Was rent with shouts, and swords sprang bare From untold scabbards to the cry Of "Nobel! death or victory!"



XXVII·HOW·GRYMBERT·THE. DACHS·WARNED·REYNARD· THAT·THE·KING·WAS·WROTH· WITH·HIM·&·WOULD·SLAY·HIM·

HEN Grymbert Dachs, own sister's son To Reynard Fox, heard censure run One-voiced against his Eme, he stood Tongue-tied with terror, while the blood Tingled with anger through his veins: Well knew he, nought but loss of pains 'Twould be (how bold soe'er he spake The wrathful words which wellnigh brake From out his lips) to seek to stay The tide of wrath, therefore away With hurried steps he turned and fled Forth from the Court, and hasting sped By shortest route to Malperdy. For bush, nor rock, nor haw, stayed he, But ran so swiftly that the sweat Bedewed his fell, for still the threat King Nobel uttered loudly rang Within his brain, and thereof sprang A thousand fears: the while he went (Although his strength was wellnigh spent And overworn), the kindly elf Thus talked and communed with himself.

"Alas! dear Eme, what evil plight Art thou now cast in! Death's drear night 138

XXVII. Grymbert's fears grow.

Hangs o'er thine head, and little hope Seems left that thou and I may cope With this new danger; yet to save My closest kinsman's life from grave And imminent peril will I try My furthest craft and subtlety. Behold! fresh scalding tears bedew My cheeks to think what pitfalls strew Thy path, dear Reynard: shouldst thou die The death that threatens thee, may I Thy suffering share. As chiefest head Of all our lineage, thou hast led The clan through many a tangled maze. What other knows the intricate ways Of life to thread as thou dost? Ne'er Art thou at loss to find some fair And good excuse to help thy friends In time of need: no man depends On thee in vain: with such keen skill Thou weavest words, that good seems ill, And ill seems good: thy wit doth win With ease each case thou speakest in."

Sped on the wings of love and fear, Unhindered, Grymbert drew anear The Fox's stronghold, where he found His Eme without the gate: hale, sound And mirthful seeming, while he played With two young pigeons, who had made Impatient flight from out the nest, High-built aloft, with view to test Their half-fledged wings, and helpless lay Prone on the earth, till past that way Came Reynard, who, whene'er he spied The helpless nestlings, loudly cried With greedy joy, and brought them straight,

XXVII. Grymbert's fears grow. To serve for supper, towards his gate, And there disported him.

When he Caught sight of Grymbert, suddenly, Ceasing his play, with pleasant voice He cried: "It truly doth rejoice My heart past measure, Nephew dear, To see thy cheerful face draw near My poor abode; no man I vow Could be more welcome than art thou In rain or shine: of all my kin None ever had the grace to win Like thee my love and high esteem. Prithee, how fares the Court? ve seem Asweat, as thou hadst ceaseless run Hither in haste: hath aught been done Or said of moment in the great And busy world, whereof of late I wot so little?"

"Ah! dear Eme," Exclaimed the Dachs: "my tongue doth teem With evil tidings; ye have lost Both life and good! for such the cost Must prove to thee if by his oath The King should stand, though I am loth To credit all that he hath sworn; To wit, that ere seven days are born, With trumpets blare, and roll of drum, All men who own his sway shall come Hither in arms: folk skilled with bows. Horsemen and footmen, and all those Who shoot with guns and bombards; brand And torch he bids them bear in hand To fire thy house: Oh! be thou ware Of this great peril and prepare Before the storm to bend thy head,

140

XXVII. Grymbert's fears grow.

And thus once more escape the dread And fatal stroke. The King is now More clipped in friendship's bond, I trow, With Isegrym and Bruin Bear, Than I with thee; they closely share His inmost counsels: what they will Is forthwith done, and both instil Into his mind such tales of thee As thief and murder carle, that he O'erbrims with anger. Then Lapreel And Corbant-Rook have made appeal For outrage fresh. Alas! quite sick I feel at heart lest thou shouldst lick The dust in death."

"Puff!" cried the Fox;
"Dear Nephew, deem'st thou on such rocks
As these my long tried craft will split?
Nay! cheer thy face, for not one whit
Doth this affright me. Though the King
And all his friends, whose voices ring
So loudly through the Court, have sworn
My death, I well may treat with scorn
Their boastful threats; doubt not that I
Will o'er them ride triumphantly.

"How loud soe'er they please to talk With clattering speech, my wit shall balk Their brainless babble; ill would go The Court if I should cease to show My face there: mighty dull 'twould be Lacking my wiles and subtlety."



·XXVIIJ· HOW ·REYNARD ·CAME· ANOTHER· TIME ·TO·THE· COURT · * * *

"DEAR Nephew, well methinks it were, We gave no further thought or care To such light troubles; come ye in, Though young, these pigeons be not thin, But plump and fat, no better meat Than pigeon knoweth man; I eat Them bones and all; e'en swallowed whole They suit digestion; sometimes dole Affects my stomach, therefore light And tender food, I love at night As wholesome fare.

Dame Ermelyne. Your loving Aunt, ye have not seen A fortnight past; most friendlywise Will she receive thee; but these lies That some have told of me, speak not Within her hearing, well I wot Her anxious heart, and fear that she Might take your news right heavily. To face all foes my heart is fain And, ere the dew dries, we again Will Courtward bend our steps, where, if I can but get fair hearing, stiff And sharp my speech shall be, and nigh The quick shall touch some shrews. Stand by Thine Eme, dear Nephew, as a friend Should do—nought fear I then the end." "Dear Eme," quoth Grymbert, "all my good

Is thine to deal with as ye would If 'twere thine own."

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

"May Heaven repay Thy kindness," said the Fox: "one day, If I but live, will I requite At full thy friendly love."

"Despite
All that great Lords may say or do,"
Quoth Grymbert, "faith is mine that you
Will clean outspeak them."

Reynard said:
"'Twould seem as though my favour sped
Well with the Leopard and the Queen;
Having their friendly help, I ween
For all the rest I need not care
The worth of one poor fragile hair,
So for my safety rest content."

No more they spake hereof, but went Within the Castle, where they found Dame Ermelyne seated on the ground, Her cubs beside her: "Sit and rest, Dear Grymbert," cried she, "honoured guest Thou ever art." "Dear Dame," replied The Dachs, "my bosom swells with pride To see my cousins grow such fair And thriving youths, a nobler pair One scarce could meet with."

While he spake

The Goodwife busied her to make
The pigeons ready, and dight the feast.
Exclaimed the Fox: "If but the least
Foreshadowing had I thou hadst been
Our guest, dear friend, past doubt were seen
Our board more richly graced: so rare
Thy visits are that scanty fare

XXVIII. The Fox all braves. To set before thee grieves my heart: But sit ye down, and take thy part With cordial welcome."

Doth it need To say that when four Foxes feed On two young pigeons, and a Dachs Doth join the banquet, surfeit lacks?

The while they feasted "Tell me true," Quoth Reynard to his guest, "how you Esteem my children, Reynardine And Rosel, both of them, I ween, Shall in due course bring great renown To all our lineage, handing down The Fox's name in high repute. Already are they most acute And cunning; many an artful wile They deftly practise to beguile Pigeons or roosting fowls, and pluck From pond or stream fat goose or duck With wondrous skill; I trust ere long To see them both so stalwart, strong, And crafty grown, that all our meat They win with ease: but first to cheat Hunters and hounds must they be taught, And well to know a gryn, lest caught Be they untimely. When their wit Is quite matured, I reckon it Will amply fill our larder store With delicate meats, that heretofore No fox has known.

And then again My fond paternal heart grows fain To see what touching likeness they Bear to their Sire, for, even in play, Ofttimes I note how they dissemble Dark spite, and make their wrath resemble Sweet kindly love. I always teach My boys, that would they overreach Their fellows, they should strive to bear A seeming frank and careless air, And keep a pleasant genial smile About their lips, though hate and guile Possess the heart; then when the foe Suspects no ill, a sudden blow Destroys him, or his throat asunder Is bitten: oft bystanders wonder To see the practice of the Fox: But though perchance it sometimes shocks Folk's feelings, 'tis a plan that I Have followed most successfully. My heart grows warm to see how runs The true Fox blood in both my sons."

XXVIII.
The Fox

Grymbert replied: "With glad surprise I mark how prudent, grave, and wise My cousins wax, and oft with pride Shall thank kind Heaven, that I'm allied To younglings dowered with wit and worth."

The feasting o'er, the Fox brought forth The bowl, and cried: "Bereft of song And ruddy wine, life drags along With weary steps—fill high the glass!" And soon, in vino veritas, He sang with voicing loud and clear Devoid alike of care or fear:

"Ever since I was born
I have felt bitter scorn
For worthy respectable people,

L

XXVIII. The Fox all braves. So with merry heart sing, Here's a fig for the King, Nought care I for law, crown, or steeple.

'Tis my honest belief
An industrious thief
Is a blessing to all good society,
To the humdrumming round,
Wherein most men are bound,
He furnishes pleasant variety.

At a good thumping lie,
No one better than I,
And thus always I get out of trouble,
And if one's not enough,
I can tell quantum suff.,
And explain all away like a bubble.

Suspicion and hate
Lightly sit on my pate,
As though they belonged to another,
And when it doth suit,
Though men call me a brute,
They are ready to treat me as brother.

5.
Then all the world through,
Perish thought, care and rue,
For ever I'm happy and jolly,
And respectable men
Will all envy me when
I am laughing at them for their folly."
146

XXVIII.

The Fox

As ended he this moral strain,
Laughed Reynard, till he cried again,
Then said: "Dear Grymbert, wears the day
Far into night, 'tis time to stay
Our revel, prithee take thy rest,
See here a littered bed of best
And softest straw that may be found
For many a mile of country round
To give repose to weary limbs."

Adown they lie, and slumber dims
All eyes ere long, save only those
Of Reynard, who no whit could close
His mind to anxious thoughts, but still
Conned o'er and o'er again those ill
And threatening news that Grymbert brought:
Though bold his speech, he knew them fraught
With direst danger; deep he sighed
To think what evil might betide
Unless a well devised excuse
Could gain at least a short-lived truce,
Till some new-forged and specious tale
Might o'er the King's dull wit prevail
Once more.

At last the morning loomed Above the hills, and Reynard roomed Malperdy's height with spirit sore And troubled, though he nathless bore His anguish calmly. Leave he took Of Ermelyne with dolorous look And anxious words.

"Alas!" quoth he,
"How shall I bid adieu to thee,
Partner of joys and pains? I go
With Grymbert towards the Court, but know
No reason why within short space

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XXVIII.
The Fox
all braves.

I should not, fain of heart, retrace My steps unscathed: but should I make A lengthened stay, let no fear shake Thy steadfast heart, and even though ill Report ye hear, yet do thou still Hold fast fair hope, and ever keep Our castle well. Forbear to weep, And rest assured that I shall blind The King with lies, and know to wind My foes around my fingers till They bow and bend to serve my will."

With tears spoke Ermelyne: "Reyner dear, Some undefined deep boding fear Weighs down my heart. Why shouldst thou deign To trust thy body once again Within the toils? Scarce yet is past The dread remembrance of your last Most perilous visit, when ye sware That no persuasion foul or fair Again should draw thee."

"Dame," quoth he,

"Past doubt or question, wonderly
This world's adventure is: it goes
Ofttimes by other ways than those
One weeneth of; for sometime when
Or this or that seems good to men,
That seeming good must they forego:
Now to the Court must I, although
With most reluctant steps; yet dread
My heart is stranger to, and fed
With hope am I, that five short days
Elapsed, once more my hand will raise
Our gate's familiar latch."

Away
He turned his face, and while the grey
148

Dim twilight broke to morn he went With Grymbert courtward, sore intent On what might next betide.

XXVIII.
The Fox

The heath Was quickly gained, and straight the sheath Was drawn from Reynard's tongue.

"Dear friend,"

Quoth he: "'tis needful to amend
The shriving given by thee days past:
Most earnestly I hoped 'twould last
For good and all, but since that time,
I grieve to say, my life from crime
Hath not been clear. Some shrewd ill turns
My heart is conscious of, and burns
Again for shrift. The wretched Bear
I flayed alive, with wish to wear
A scrip or wallet of his skin,
And with excuse to travel in
Stout gear, caused both the Wolves to lose,
For my behoof, those well-made shoes
That they were born with.

Then the King

I cozened with a fine-spun string
Of lies more wild than erst were heard
By mortal man, and thereby stirred
His wrath against the Wolf and Bruin,
In full persuasion they would ruin
His royal estate, and basely slay
Him and the Queen. I scarce need say
'Twas mere invention:—false also
Was that fine tale of Hulsterlo,
Whose wondrous wealth of hidden gold
Was nothing better than a bold
Unblushing lie, for well I wist
That no such place did e'er exist.

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

Then Cuwaert Hare, and Bellyn Ram, Decoyed I treacherously with sham Of kindly talk to Malperdy, Assurance given that they should be My fellow pilgrims: straight I slew And ate the Hare, and thereon grew So reckless, that in scorn I sent His head by Bellyn to present As gift to our most gracious King: From thee I learn that thence did spring A sea of sorrows to the Ram And all his kindred.

Next I am Bound to confess that yesterday, As Lapreel Coney, on his way To Court, by-passed my house, I gave Him such a buffet, that to save His life he forward leapt and ran Swift as aforetime sped that man Who outpaced Atalanta, or Most surely had he served me for A supper even as Cuwaert did. As to the mischief that betid Dame Sharpbecke, wife to Corbant-Rook, There's no denying that I took Her down at one great gulp, and he Might justly feel in some degree Displeased and angry.

But just now One thing recurs, which was, I trow, O'erlooked when last you gave me shrift.

"Confessed at full, I might uplift
My heart to Heaven devoid of flaw,
But now sad memory tends to draw
My soul towards Hell—for gross deceit
150

Therein I practised: prithee treat My new shrift kindly.

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

As the way
I took with Isegrym one day
Betwixt Houthulst and Elverding,
Approaching near we heard the ring
Of well shod hoofs: a fine red mare
Soon overtook us, while a fair
Well-fed black colt beside her went:
As mostly haps, the Wolf was spent
And wellnigh dead for hunger, so
Quoth he: 'Dear Reynard, prithee go'
And ask that Mare if she will sell
Her foal?'

Ouoth I: 'The truth to tell. I much mislike the ungrateful task, Yet nathless will make bold to ask The question: ' so with courteous air Spake forth: 'Dear madam, may I dare Without offence to inquire if you Will sell your daughter?' No ado She made, but answered: 'Yea, sir, yea! 'Tis quite the fashion of the day.' Then said I: 'Prithee name the sum.' Ouoth she: 'If thou wilt kindly come Behind me, there may'st thou behold The price in plain-writ figures told: Perchance some learned clerk ve be Who cons all writing readily. I marked her twinkling eye, and knew Its look meant mischief; quoth I: 'You Mistake me, madam, weak and small My schoolcraft runs, but let me call My learned friend, 'tis he would buy Your foal.'

'Pray let him come anigh,'

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

Quoth she, 'his learning will suffice, I doubt me not, to spell the price Writ plain in figures on my hoof; Pray wherefore stands thy friend aloof?'

"To Isegrym then ran I straight, And cried: 'Now may'st thou satiate Thine appetite with well-fed colt;' 'Ha! ha!' laughed he, 'the whole I'll bolt In one great feast.'

'Stay Isegrym,'
Quoth I, 'the red Mare hath a whim
Ye lift her hinder hoof and read
The price for which 'tis well agreed
That she the tender colt will sell:
If thou a scholar art, right well
May'st thou decipher what is writ,
Though my dull eyes make nought of it,
Seeing I truant played from school.'

"'Dear Nephew, deem'st thou me a fool?'
The Wolf replied, 'pray, what should let
My skill in reading? Never yet
Were letters made by mortal man,
But what with equal ease I can
Read off, as though they spelt my name.
My school was Oxenford, and shame
Should count it could I not construe
French, Latin, Dutch, and English. Few,
Like me, are licensed in both laws,
Or e'er had chance to gather saws
From doctors of the finest wit.
Ofttimes in higher courts I sit,
And give forth sentence.

While I go

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

To lift the beldame's foot, and know Her daughter's value, rest thou here.' Then forth he went, devoid of fear, Straight towards the Mare and asked if he Could buy her foal, and what would be The price.

Quoth she: 'No great amount: Lift thou my dexter hoof, and count The figures writ there.'

He replied: 'Pray let me read:' when she aside Shot forth her hoof, just newly shod With six stout nails, and o'er the sod, Supine, lay Isegrym extended All motionless, as though were ended His earthly course.

The Mare and Foal Tripped lightly off, and then I stole Close up, where lay the Wolf half dead, Most sorely wounded. Out his head The blood poured forth, and like a hound Well thrashed he howled, until the sound Made echo hideous.

Then to him
Quoth I: 'Dear Uncle Isegrym,
How fares it with thee? Hast thou sated
Thy maw with colt's flesh, and abated
The pangs of hunger? Wherefore gave
Ye nought to him who kindly drave
For thee the bargain? What was writ
Beneath the Mare's hind hoof? Was it
In rhyme or prose? Canst thou rehearse
Some passage, sentence, line or verse?
I trow 'tis cantus that ye sing
So clear that all the woodlands ring
With thy sweet notes.'

XXVIII. The Fox all braves. 'Ah! Reynard,' cried

The Wolf, ''twere well ye cast aside
Your heartless japing, and that tone
Of mocking ceased: a heart of stone
Might well be melted at the plight
In which ye see me. Never wight
Endured worse handling as I ween
Than gave me that long-legged quean.
Within her iron shoe were pricked
Six hard-wrought nails, wherewith she kicked
My wretched head enough to cleave it—
Ah! Reynard, wilt thou then believe it?
Each nail I took to be a letter
Most foully made of me its debtor!
Never again shall I have need
Letters of such-like sort to read.'

"'Dear Eme,' exclaimed I, 'if the truth Thy mouth proclaimeth, then forsooth I marvel greatly, for it seemed From thine own telling that ye teemed With wit and wisdom, but 'tis clear, To judge from this strange tale I hear, That clerks by studying much in schools May sometimes grow most learned fools.'

"Here ends the tale how Isegrym Suffered such scathe in head and limb As brought him nigh to death.

And so,

Dear Nephew, thus at full ye know All wrongful deeds my search can find In that great garner of the mind Which men call memory: now I feel Much eased, for holy shrift will steel My heart to suffer ill, and none

XXVIII.

The Fox all braves.

Can say how roughly chance may run Against my luck at Court. But fear Shall void my heart when, once more, clear My soul is made of deadly sin; Though death fell on me, I should win Eternal bliss, and therefore light As air shall feel when throughly dight With holy shriving."

Grymbert said: "Great trespass hast thou done, but dead Must he who once is dead remain. And crimes committed, ne'er again Can be recalled—yet I assoil Thee wholly, for within the toil Of death I greatly fear ye stand, Unless thou clean canst wash thine hand Of some foul acts, whereof the worst Is that ye dared, with heart accurst, To send the innocent Cuwaert's head (By Bellyn Ram, as letters sped,) Within your wallet to the King. Moreover, with a trumped-up string Of leasings did ye seek to blind His heart and eyes with tales unkind Of other beasts.—'Twas evil done."

Answered the Fox: "What man can run His course throughout the world, and see Its crooked, wily ways, yet be Pure as a chrisom-child? Nay, nay; He lives not who can soothly say That, having honeycombs o'erpicked And handled, he hath never licked His fingers. Ofttimes grow I vexed To think how widely from that text I swerve, which bids each man to love

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

And duly reverence God above All things within this world, and then Each other one of Christian men E'en as himself he should regard. Nephew, I find most wondrous hard It is to keep this law. The will That works within my breast doth still Wage war against the outward wit, And when sometimes a holy fit Comes o'er my spirit, mighty dull I feel, as though a-gathering wool My wits had gone, and scarce know what It is that ails me, for a knot Of tangled thoughts disturbs my mind. Thank God! I now have left behind My sinful life and evil hate. No longer am I reprobate, But love pure holy thoughts, and climb In contemplation towards sublime And heavenly things—when quite alone— But many a rock and stumbling stone I find when through the world I fare. Loose Priests and Prelates meet I there, And in their wicked foot-spores tread, By fleshly lusts enticed and led To merry, jovial life, and thus Good thoughts are lost, and riotous Luxurious times succeed; men sing, Pipe, laugh, and play, till everything That tends to goodness is forgot. Prelates and Curates, as I wot, Do ill, yet preach all otherwise; From them I learned the japes and lies I now am famed for. In the Court Where haughty Churchmen most resort Are leasings freely plied; men dare

Scarce tell to these great Lords a fair Outspoken honest case, but must Use flattering falsehoods would they thrust Their causes forward, else the door Is in their faces flung, before Ever their plea be heard. And so, Dear Nephew, thus the world doth go: Here, men must flatter, pray, and curse,

And there, some well-worn cheat rehearse,

So twisted that it shows all fair.

XXVIII.
The Fox
all braves.

"Another time, with cautious care
Seek out your neighbour's weakest point,
And then (as through an armour joint
Thou'dst thrust thy sword) with skill ye may
Word-wound the foe, and gain the day.
Or sometimes, if ye deal with simple,
Unwary folk, ye may bewimple
A lie in such unwonted wise
That, 'neath its strange new-fangled guise,
Semblance it bears to fair-eyed truth.

"Or, if one be devoid of ruth,
And glibly speak his sentence out,
Unchecked by stammer, drawl, or doubt,
Then, though he utter nought but lies,
Success may follow, and for prize
A scarlet robe may he obtain
Fair trimmed with gryse, and ever fain
May spend his life-days, seen he shall
Find honour both in temporal
And spiritual Courts, and do
His own free will, whate'er ensue.

Great doctors tell us that at times To lie or jape, in small things, chimes

157

XXVIII.
The Fox
all braves.

With life's hard needs, for that man who Speaks ever truth can scarce glide through This evil world. The best man may Lie when the need comes, but away Drive ill effect by later rede."

Cried Grymbert: "Surely thou shalt speed Dear Eme, in all ye undertake, For thy clear spirit is awake To every point that e'er hath been Made doubt or question of. I ween That whatsoever part ye took, Your subtle speech would make it look Or right or wrong, as pleased ye best. What need hast thou to be confessed Or seek my shrift? 'Tis thou shouldst be The Priest, and shriving give to me And other guileless sheep. Ye know The world's estate so well, and show Such subtle wit, no man could stand Against thy pleading, more than sand 'Gainst hardest adamant."

Thus they talked In friendly fashion, while they walked The Courtward road: but when they neared The royal precincts, sore afeard Grew Reynard's heart: his courage sank To zero; yet no whit he shrank From gaze of those who stood around, But forward strode as he were bound On some high mission to the King.

The Dachs, with earnest will to bring Relief and comfort o'er his heart, Stood close beside him, and apart Whispered: "Good Uncle, have no fear, 158

Ofttimes much better than a year One day may prove."

XXVIII.
The Fox all braves.

The Fox replied: "God thank you, Nephew, none beside Would solace give, as thou hast done."

Then forth he stepped with air of one Who boldly saith: "What will ye then? Behold me!"

Close within his ken
A many of his kinship stand,
And some he knew for those whose hand
Was aye against him, yet were some
Who loved him well.

When lastly come Within the Court, upon his knees He fell, and straight a hum, like bees Swarming in haysel-time, arose From dearest friends and direst foes, While cried he: "Sire, for old days sake Lend me thine ear!"—and forth he spake.



·XXIX· HOW·THE·FOX·& ·EXCUSED·HIM·BEFORE·& ·THE·KING;&·HOW·THE·& ·KING·ANSWERED & ·&

'M AY God from whom no thing is hid, And whose almighty power doth bid This lower world, and that unseen, Preserve ye both, great King and Queen, And grant ye, in his bounteous grace, With clear unerring wit to trace Which man hath right, and which hath wrong: XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

For many, alas! there be among Your courtiers, who by outward show Belie their inmost minds and throw A veil o'er evil deeds thereby. I would that God showed openly Men's trespass, and all thoughts he writ Clearly on each man's brow: then it Were plainly seen, most gracious Lord, What wight is he that doth afford To thee due service, rathe and late Striving to cross unkindly fate For thy behoof, and all thy will To bring to birth, though nought but ill He hath from evil shrews, who thrust Thy truest friend aside. Unjust And cruel men now boldly charge Foul crimes against me, and a targe Have made of my fair name, to shoot Their poisoned darts at, though it boot Them little deal. Harrowe! I cry On this false crew (who would belie My love to thee, most honoured Lord,) With trust that thou wilt ne'er accord Thine ear to those, whose aim and end Is death to thy most faithful friend.

"Therefore, dear Lord, do I beseech
That in thy wisdom, thou to each
And every man wilt justice deal
By right and law, and here appeal
To thee as judge, that thou declare
Where lies the guilt. I ask but fair
And equal measure. Ere I go
From out this Court, the world shall know
What man stands here: no flatterer thou
Behold'st before thee, for I vow

To set my life in such clear light
That thou wilt cry: 'The Fox hath right.'"

XXIX. The Fox speaks

Silence profound as that of morn, Ere day's wild turmoil yet is born, Reigned o'er the Court as Reynard ceased; But inwardly each listening beast Wondered to hear how stoutly spake The Fox, e'en while his heart must quake With conscious guilt.

At length the King

Broke the dead hush.

"Although ye bring

Your case before us in suchwise As might deceive some folk, the lies And garbled truths, thou dar'st to speak With sounding phrase, are all too weak To help thee more. Nay, Reynard, nay! Thy race is run, and thou this day Shalt as a miscreant hang. The pain That thou must suffer I would fain Shorten, and thus forbear to chide Those crimes which thou wouldst gladly hide With glozing speech. How much of love Thou bearest towards us, nought could prove More plainly than the latest deeds Thy life is charged with; evil weeds But evil garnering find; the Rook With reason plains him, that ye took Treacherous advantage when his mate, Sharpbecke, would aid thee: murderous hate Against Lapreel hast thou displayed When he polite obeisance made In passing near thee. Know'st thou not The proverb, that an earthen pot May go too often to the well?

161

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XXIX. The Fox speaks fair. So likewise, Reynard, thou may'st swell Thy pack of lies to bursting; now, The measure of thy crimes I trow O'erbrims, and thou must surely die."

At these words Reynard's heart beat high, While deathlike sweat o'erspread his frame, And hot and cold his life-blood came. "Alas!" thought he, "had I but known How things would turn, then far Cologne Had held me rather than this Court, Where risk is mine to be the sport Of adverse fortune. Now my cue It is to brave the matter through With new-framed falsehoods."

"Sire," he cried,

"Reason it were, ere ye decide My condemnation unto death, To suffer that my latest breath Were spent in self-defence; for erst My counsel was by no means worst Or lightest reckoned in thy need; Hath not the Fox been true to speed Thy good when other beasts have gone Their way, and left their King alone To combat fiercest foes? If now Ill beasts belie me, will ye trow Their words, and bid that I refrain My tongue from daring to complain Against their slanders? Time hath been When thy dread Majesty would ween My voice the worthiest. Old good deeds, And wise and worthy foretime redes, Must quicken in thy heart. See here. Moreover, how, flockmeal, anear Thy throne doth stand a goodly heap 162

Of those who own my lineage. Deep Would be their grief if I should lose My life; for though light words they use To mewards, and would seem to set But little by me now, they yet Would sore resent it should they see Their kinsman suffer wrongfully. My Lord, I ask thee, dost thou dream That one who in his soul did deem Him guilty of such damning crimes, As I am charged with, would betimes Attend thy Court, as I this day, In midst of foemen?

Nay, Sire, nay!
Most surely not for all the gold
That wealthy Crassus held, thrice told,
Had murderer ventured hither. Free
I roamed, as fish that haunt the sea,
Or birds that wing the air: what need
Had I, if conscious of misdeed,
To put myself in reach of law?
But God be thanked, so clear from flaw
My life is, that I fearless come,
As one who wins his well-loved home.

"Though some ill shrews would do me spite In secret, yet in day's fair light They dare not speak.

But yester eve,
As night her filmy web 'gan weave,
My Nephew Grymbert brought the news
That some vile dastard dared accuse
Anew my blameless life; at first
My righteous indignation burst
Beyond control. In rage I leapt
About my Castle; anger swept
163

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Fox speaks

XXIX. The My soul as mighty tempests sweep Across the slumbering ocean-deep And lash it into fury.

> Grief Succeeded anger, till relief My spirit sought beneath the dome Of spacious Heaven, and forth my home I wandered o'er the lonesome heath: By good hap there I found beneath A tree, my Uncle, Martin hight, Wisest of apes, and well bedight, As many a priest, with ghostly lore, For, well ye wot, a plenteous store Thereof he gathered, when he lay Within the Palace of Cambray, Nine years, as Bishop's Advocate. At once, with voice compassionate And kindly, quoth he: 'What sad cheer Weighs down thy spirit, Nephew dear? I see plain writ across thy face That some great trouble holdeth place Within thine heart, and ever well It is that man his grief should tell To priest or friend: most wondrous aid That wight shall find, who unafraid Lays bare his inmost soul to one With whom in perfect unison His spirit feels; ofttimes the man Who standeth by can better scan How troublous questions may be solved Than he whose interest is involved Most closely; many a time when woe Deadens the heart, men act as though They had their inwit lost.'

> 'Dear Eme.' Replied I quickly, 'thou dost deem 164

The case most wisely; I am brought To this great heaviness by nought Blameworthy in myself; as friends I ever treated those whose ends And evil aims now seem to be To wreck my life all utterly.

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

"'So happed it that as yesterday I sat before my door to say
My Matin prayers, the Coney passed:
"Good-morrow," quoth I, "why so fast
Dear Lapreel?" "Reynard," he replied,
"Have ye, by happy chance, inside
Your house a scrap of meat? I seek
To gain the Court, but feel so weak
With hunger, that I scarce can go
Beyond thy threshold."

"Ye shall know," he taste of manchet bread

Cried I, "the taste of manchet bread And sweet new butter ere ye tread Another step."

I never eat
On Wednesday, wot ye well, flesh meat,
And rather had of hunger died,
Than break my fast as Whitsuntide
Drew near; for whatso man will taste
The overest wisdom, must not waste
His life on earthly joys, but live
In ghostly habitude and give
Heed to the precepts of our Lord:
Each man who would thereto accord
His ways, must fast 'gainst festals high
Et vos estote parati: my
Most earnest longing 'tis to be
Prepared to meet eternity.

"'When Lapreel to his full had eaten . 165

Fox speaks fair.

XXIX. The Of butter sweet, and manchet wheaten (As white as new-burst may-bloom), comes My little Rosel, seeking crumbs Which dropt around, for day and night Have children keen-set appetite. In peace the dear child munched the chips, When, all at once, his tender lips The Coney smote, broke his white teeth, And stretched him swooning on the heath. Soon as his brother Reynkyn saw This wanton outrage on the law That governs friendly greeting, he Sprang forward so indignantly, That in one moment Lapreel's fate Had been decided, but I straight Seized Reynkyn, just in time to save The Coney's life, and thereon gave My son reproof, with many a stroke, Although, God knows, that wellnigh broke My fond paternal heart. Lapreel, Ye might suppose, unless of steel His soul was forged, would show some sign Of gratitude for my benign And all too friendly deed. But nay— Heedless of grace or thanks, away He sped to where the King doth hold His royal Court, and there, with bold Unblushing lies, his friend traduced. E'en then my tongue had not been loosed Against him had ye not with kind And sympathetic words my mind Unlocked; for well 'tis known that ne'er My heart doth spite or malice bear.

> "'The selfsame day came Corbant-Rook In wretched plight, he sobbed, and shook His plumes 'mid fits of wildest grief. 166

Quoth I, "What aileth? some relief Perchance my rede may give." He said: 'Ah! woe! alas! my wife is dead! See yonder on the heath a hare Lies mouldering, and she, feasting there, Replete with worms became; atwo They bit her throat, and I must rue Her loss for evermore." XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Then I
Asked how it happed, with will to try
Sweet comfort's balsam, but he flew
Straight off, and nothing more I knew,
Until with wonderment I heard
That this perverse ill-minded bird
Complained at Court that I had slain
His consort. What could be more vain?
For say thou straightly, dearest Eme,
Could any man with reason dream
That one whose race hath trod the earth
Since first creation gave it birth,
By any means could come anigh
A rook, whose nature 'tis to fly
Through Heaven's expanse?

An outcast hound

I better had been born, than bound To endure such scorning, but, perchance Wise Heaven sends suffering to enhance Our bliss hereafter, and past sin May thus full absolution win. Ill oft breeds good, and therefore I Will take my penance patiently.'

"The Ape replied: 'Dear Reynard, go At once to Court, and bow thee low Before the King and Lords.'

I cried:

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

'Dear Eme, no other thing beside
Would so much glad my heart, but this
Straight course is barred to me ywis.
The great Archdeacon hath declared
The Pope's dread curse on one who dared
Time past to counsel Isegrym,
That since he could in nowise trim
His life to monkish rule, 'twere well
That he should void his hated cell
At Eelmare, and the cowl forsake,
Rather than endless wailing make
About the straightness of the ways
That rule the Cloister.

Nights and days Of reading, chanting, and much prayer, Coupled with hard and scanty fare.

"'He plaining vowed, should he abve The Convent longer, he must die Ere summer came. As loving friend I pitied him, and helped to end The wretched state he scarce endured. Alas! my kindness but ensured His mortal hatred. Ever now His study day and night is how His benefactor may be hung. I feel my nervous frame unstrung, To think the Wolf hath understood My kindness in such wise that good Doth but engender ill. And so Ye well may judge that scarce I know Whither to turn for trusty friend To give me counsel; at an end Of all resource I seem to be: But what most wears the heart of me Is this—that I must leave my home, 168

And wife, and children, while at Rome I seek for absolution. Great Is my alarm to think what fate May hap to them while I engage In this long toilsome pilgrimage.

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

"'From this dread curse absolved and free, Well might I go undauntedly Before the Court, and plead my cause So clearly, that worst foes would pause Ere they opposed me; but I fear That should I unassoiled draw near To men uncursed, God's direst plague Might light upon me.'

'Let no vague Blind terror seize thee,' quoth the Ape: 'Put faith in me, and thou shalt 'scape The Church's censure; well I know The wiles of Rome, and thou shalt go Through all unscathed, if thou but trust To counsel vigorous, wise, and just. Martin am I, the Bishop's Clerk, Well versed and skilled in every dark And subtle method whereby folk Gain free deliverance from the yoke Of grossest crimes.

I first will cite
The Archdeacon, and deny his right
To hold thee 'neath the curse; then next
Will I discover fair pretext
Why thou shouldst gain, despite his will,
Full absolution, and until
He grants it he shall know no peace,
Nor, that accomplished, will I cease
To aid thee. At the Pope's Court dwells
My Uncle Simon, who foretells

169

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XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Unerringly how suits will hap For those who shower within his lap Abundant gifts: my trusty friends, Wayscathe and Takeall know the ends. Of those who salve their palms, to serve, And order take that law shall swerve To this side or to that, for those Through whom their meed and profit grows. Have courage, Nephew, when the West The sun once more hath gained, no rest My limbs shall find until my home I reach within the walls of Rome: And then forthwith my constant care Shall be thy business: ye may fare, Unhindered, straightway to the Court, Devoid of fear lest ye the sport Should be of plague or curse: I take Thy sins on mine own head, and make Ye clear as chrisom child.

The Court ye come to, thou shalt there Seek out my wife and sisters twain, And children three, with all their train Of kin and lineage. Then thy tale Speak boldly forth; my wife no frail Unstable woman is, but one Who knoweth all that may be done In cases like to thine; right glad Is she to aid her friends, and sad Shall be his doom who cannot find Help at her hands. Keep this in mind, That though with friends ye sometimes bicker, Stick to them fast, for blood runs thicker Than water flows.

But if beset By fraudful hindrance, ye can get 170 No judge who dare affirm your right; Delay not, but through day and night Speed thou thy envoy unto Rome, And let him seek me 'neath the dome Of Holy Peter: make me know By what contrivance matters go Against thy suit, and I will wake Such storm of thunder as shall shake The land across from sea to sea:

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

"'Yea! though thine enemy should be The mightiest Queen or lordliest King, My power is such that I can bring Their realms beneath the Papal curse, And if that fail, can send a worse And bitterer banning; straight my hand Should cause to fall o'er all the land An interdict, which doth surpass All other woes; the Holy Mass Doth cease; sweet singing of the psalter Is heard no more; before the altar No lover's vows are pledged; the child Must die unchristened, and the wild Lamenting wail that mourns the dead Must rise o'er graves unhallowèd. With these dread weapons will I fight Should Courts withhold from thee due right. The Pope is nought; he waxeth old; And through the Cardinal of gold Are all things ruled and governed. Is he, and powerful friends among The great ones hath; his concubine So closely doth his heart entwine With love, that what she lusts to do Is done, though Heaven and Earth should rue. This powerful Dame I own for niece,

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Which kinship greatly doth increase My masterdom at Court, and thus It rarely haps that foes nonplus A cause I father.

Seek the King Forthwith, and doubt not he will bring Thy quittance to effect, for he Judgeth no man relentlessly.'

"Great Lord, my inmost soul was stirred To laughter when this tale I heard, And joy o'erspread my heart the while, For Fortune deigned once more to smile Around my life; then gladly came I hither, that the unworthy, lame, And garbled tales that some have told To work me ill, I might unfold In light of truth.

If any dare
In this assembly to declare
Real crimes against me, and can bring
Some witness forth, with colouring
Of honest fairness on his tongue,
Then shall I count it first among
My bounden duties that I make
Him full amends, or thereon stake
My life, if thou but set a day
And field of meeting for array
Of deadly combat—ever seen
My foeman be not one of mean
Or churlish birth, but like to me
In race, long lineage, and degree.

"Who best acquits him in the field To him the palm of honour yield— In truth and justice am I strong, God save the right, and wreck the wrong

Then all the beasts, or rich or poor, Who thronged the Court from throne to door. Stood mute as senseless stones or stocks. To hear with what stout words the Fox Upheld his cause, while Corbant-Rook And Lapreel Coney scarce dared look Around for terror, but both fled Forth to the fields, then trembling said To one another: "Let us pray That He whose might rules all things, may On this fell murderous Fox bestow Due guerdon: he alone doth know Base falsehood so to hide and wrap In clouding words, that not one scrap Of crime he leaves unveiled, but true His speech as gospel soundeth. Few His falseness know like us, and how Should witnesses be found enow To overthrow his tale? To fly Is safer than the field to try Against this losel, for though five We were and he but one, alive No single man could 'scape, for he Fights as he speaks, right craftily."

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Both Isegrym and Bruin Bear Felt sore abashed, and dire despair Fell on their hearts when they this twain Saw slink from Court, as they were fain To escape the Fox's wrath.

The King
Then said: "Let whatso man will bring
Complaint against the Fox, appear,
That we, straightway, with equal ear,
May judgment give; but yesterday
Against him stood a full array

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Of cruel foes, their eyes aglow, Angry, full-voiced, and eager—now Uncharged he stands before my throne— What man is he will cast first stone?"

"My Lord," quoth Reynard, "many men There be whose courage waxes when They see no adversary nigh, But should their foe dare make reply Their courage shrinks; e'en now the Rook And Lapreel base advantage took To speak when I was far, yet flee With breathless haste whene'er my plea Is laid before thee, knowing well What fair plain truth my tongue doth tell. Nathless, had these two shrews implored Forgiveness, and hadst thou, great Lord, Laid thy command on me to give Them grace and pardon, they might live Unharmed (although their trespass great Hath been towards me, and towards the state O'er which thou rulest); for I love Vengeance to leave to One above, And to reclaim my foes will try By mercy, love, and clemency."

"Reynard," the King replied, "'twould seem Thou art much changed; but may I deem With safety that within thine heart This high-toned virtue hath such part As thy soft floyting words express? All this new-found ingenuousness Seems somewhat doubtful; simple, fair, And open sounds thy speech, but bear I well in mind what deeds of late Have stained thy guilty hands; thy great

And grievous trespass I forgave And thou didst formulate with grave And solemn words, a vow that ye On pilgrimage, far over sea, Would wend your ways; and did I not Send staff and scrip to make thy lot Of easier yoke?

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

Ye then did send
By Bellyn Ram, thy dupe and friend,
The scrip again, and therein found
Was Cuwaert's head; ye thus have crowned
Your former trespass by a crime
Till now unknown; throughout all time,
What liege ere this hath ever sped
To any Lord his servant's head?
A ghastly gift! Deny it not!
For Bellyn on this selfsame spot
The deed confessed, and such reward
As he hath found must we accord
To thee likewise, or straight would be
End to all law and equity."

Then waxed the Fox so sore afraid
That speechless stood he; disarrayed
Were all his wits; he looked about
With piteous air among the rout
Of those who flocked around, and spied
Full many a well-known face, but died
The heart within him when none spake—
Alas! no word of comfort brake
The ominous silence, nor was stirred
One hand or foot to help him.

Heard
Was then once more the King's stern voice,
High raised: "My duty knows no choice,
Thou subtle felon and false shrew,

XXIX. The Fox speaks fair.

But to pronounce the sentence due To fraud and murder—now all dumb Thou standest, what is then become Of thy much vaunted wit?"

Great dread Crept over Reynard, and his head Swam round with fear, but blithe and gay Were Wolf and Bear, assured that they Would ride triumphant, while their foe The bitterness of death should know.



XXX HOW DAME RUESKENAWE ANSWERED FOR THE FOX TO THE KING & & & & &

THE great She-Ape, Dame Rukenawe,
The Fox's Aunt, with anger saw
The turn things took: she with the Queen
Stood high in favour, and I ween
Her presence 'twas that helped the Fox
To steer his course among the rocks
And quicksands that beset him. Well
She knew all wisdom, and could spell
The subtle purpose of each cause
That came before her; dubious laws
Could she expound with any man.
The pandects of Justinian
She knew by heart. Where'er she came
The suitor gladdened at her name,
Whose cause she held.

She rose and said:
"My Lord, all bias should be dead
Within your breast whene'er ye sit
176

In judgment: wrath doth not befit Your noblesse: all the points of law I know, and every learned saw, Can far more skilfully set down Than those who plead in fur-trimmed gown, For not a few have learned of me The law's deep art and mystery.

XXX. Dame Rukenawe's rede.

- "Within the palace-house at Woerden, Where dwelt the Pope, I had for guerdon A fresh-made bed of fragrant hay, While other beasts who lodged there lay Their limbs on bare unlittered ground.
- "Already was I so renowned For perfect knowledge of the code, And for my wealth of words that flowed To loose each legal knot, that first My voice the Court allowed, nor durst Another interrupt my speech.
- "The famous Seneca doth teach That 'tis the duty of a Lord, Before aught else, that he afford To every man his lawful right, And suffer not that in despite Of safeguard granted, he should be Death-doomed, or sold to slavery.
- "Let every man who standeth here Bethink him if his life be clear, Through all its waves, of sin and crime, Or if perchance in bygone time His trespass hath not been as great As Reynard's. Let kind pity wait

N

XXX. Dame Rukenawe's rede. Upon his judgment. Then recall, That he who standeth soon may fall, And that the Gospel's words are these: Estote misericordes A she-ape speaks, and lightly she Must be excused false quantity], Be ever merciful—and more— It standeth writ since days of vore: Nolite judicare, et Non judicabimini, and yet, Spite of this sentence, men oft deem Their fellows as 'twould fairly seem These blessed words they had forgot, Or rashly dared to heed them not, Yet in those holy words we see 'Judge not, that judgèd not ye be.'

"'Tis written how the Pharisees
Charged a poor woman, even as these
Charge Reynard, and with pitying eye
Our Lord judged her adultery,
And bid him cast first stone who could
Declare him faultless, pure, and good.
And which of these brave folk, I pray,
Who crowd and throng the Court this day,
With conscience clear could cast a stone
At Reynard, being such an one
As hath his life lived spotless, free
From stain, in white robed purity?

"Ofttimes a man will plain and sigh Because within his neighbour's eye He sees a mote, yet ne'er doth dream That in his own eye lies a beam! In very sooth, my Lord, I trow That many a man here standing now,

Ready to judge the Fox, is worse Than him he dares with lies to asperse.

XXX. Dame Rukenawe's rede.

"Though one fall oft, yet if at last, Repentant, he resolve to cast From off his neck the yoke of sin, Shall not he God's sweet mercy win? Seeing his pity aye receives The vilest sinner, and relieves His shoulder of the load it bears. With heavy heart dear Reynard wears Sin's garment foul, and fain would he Don the white robe of sanctity. Have not his grandsire and his father Been worthy friends to you, much rather Than Isegrym and Bruin Bear, Who now your love and favour share (With all their ill-bred kin and race), To his exclusion and disgrace? Should I but draw comparison Betwixt what that false crew have done To give thee counselling and aid, And the brave part that Reynard played Oft and again within thy realm, My speech would utterly o'erwhelm That band with shame, for Reynard's rays Of wisdom still illume thy days.

"Methinketh wellnigh upside down
The Court is turned, when each base clown,
Unworthy flatterer, or false shrew,
Usurps thine ear, and good and true
Old counsellors are thrust aside,
Whose constant labour, aim, and pride
Hath been devoted to one thing
'Fore all—the honour of their King!

XXX. Dame Rukenawe's rede. Deem'st thou the welfare of the land 'Neath losels, shrews, and churls can stand?"

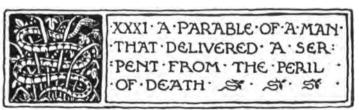
The King said: "Dame, if thou hadst felt Such direful strokes as have been dealt To others by the Fox, I ween That much less ardent thou hadst been In his defence. If deadly hate, Which nought can smother or abate, Burn in my heart against him, why Shouldst thou thereon look wonderingly? My safeguard hath he set at nought. And, steeped in theft and murder, brought My realm in disrepute. If trust Thou feel'st that all his ways are just. Upright, and clear, 'twere well I deem That thou, to prove in what esteem Thou hold'st thy friend, shouldst forthwith set Him o'er the altar, and there let Him have thy worship as a Saint. Thy tongue alone hath power to paint His crimes as virtues. No one lives, I trow, in all the world who gives To Reynard Fox unstinted praise, But thee alone, and with amaze I list thy lauding: but beware Lest in the end ye find some snare Or crafty trap prepared to take Thee unawares; he doth awake No love responsive in the breast Of kin or friend; than this no test In all the world can surer be Of a life lived unworthily.

"I marvel much that thou shouldst own For comrade one whose deeds have shown 180

XXX. Dame Rukenawe's rede.

Such evil record. Never yet
In all my life days have I met
One man, save thou, who fellowship
Held with the Fox, across whose lip
A word of good or thanks did pass
Concerning him, for ever 'twas
His custom with his tail to strike
His friend—thy fate 'twill be belike."

"My Lord," the She-Ape quick replied,
"I love the Fox, and none beside
Esteem of equal worth. I know
A tale wherein he once did show
So much of well-poised careful wit,
Within your Court, that ye to it
Gave highest praise. Alack the while!
That now thy face no more doth smile
On his deserving: yet shall weight
Of worth bring down the scale, though fate
Seem fickle for a time. No day
A man should praise until away
'Tis worn toward eventide: good rede
Is lost if men be slack to heed.



"WO years are fled since hither came
A Man and Serpent: each laid claim
To have the judgment of the Court
For his behoof. So strange and thwart
The question loomed, that held in doubt
181

Were you and yours, nor could thereout The issue be divined. The case Thus stood betwixt them.

At a place Not distant far from this, it happed The Serpent, by ill chance, was trapped In gliding through a hedge: the snare So tightly gripped his neck, that there He must have perished, but the Man Passed near the place, and speeding ran, Responsive to the Serpent's cry, Who made his prayer most earnestly For aid ere yet the little breath Wherewith he spoke were snatched by death. The Man with kindly pity gave The needful help; 'But if I save Thy life,' quoth he, 'wilt thou make oath To harm me not? I else were loth To set thee free.'

The Serpent swore A binding curse that nevermore, Whate'er might hap or chance until His death-day broke, would he or spill His venom 'gainst him or devise His hurt or harm in any wise.

"This well agreed, the man set free
The captive snake, and peaceably
The new-found friends together fared
O'er mountain, plain, and stream, and shared
Whate'er of good or ill betid,
Until the pangs of hunger bid
The Serpent seek whereby he might
Appease his ravenous appetite.

"The Man, as nearest food at hand,

Awhile with murderous eyes he scanned,
Then at him darted, as he would
Make now that friend to serve for food,
Whose act had been the cause why he
Felt hunger's tooth so cruelly.
The man in terror started back,
Crying, 'How now? wilt thou attack
The friend who saved thy life? Thine oath
Rings in mine ear, and I am loth
To think so soon thou hast forgot
The debt thou ows't me; didst thou not

XXXI. Strange serpent snare.

Quoth the snake,

'Tis true that I did lately make
A solemn oath that I would ne'er
Do harm or scathe to thee, but fair
It is at need to cast aside
Rash oaths; as well might I have died
Within the snare as now to lose
My life by hunger, and must choose
'Twixt death and breach of oath.'

The man Replied: 'O knave! at least ye can

Some respite give me, till we light On those who know to judge aright

In such deep questions.

Swear lifelong friendship?'

Unto this
The Snake agreed, for nought amiss
He found the plea, and met they soon
Tyselin the Raven, with that loon
His son Slyndpere, to whom they told
The case at full: the Raven rolled
His cunning eyes with joy, then said:
'Tis clear the Serpent soon were dead
Should he forbear the man to slay;
Is it not therefore plain, I pray,

That famine frees him from his oath? The man must die, and surely both My son and I the feast may share.'

"Cried then the Serpent: 'Do ye dare, O Man, to question now my right To eat you?'

Quoth the wretched wight:
'How should a robber, who vile meed
Would gain in judging, give good heed
To righteous judgment? All alone
Doth Tyselin stand, too, and 'tis known
Past doubt that two or three at least
Should form a Court, for thus, increased
Is hope of justice, and the law
Should deemsters know, devoid of flaw.
When two give sentence, I agree
Thou then shalt work thy will on me
Despite thine oath.'

Forth then they fare To seek new judgment, and the Bear And Wolf they met ere long, to whom They told their tale, demanding doom.

"They ruled forthwith the Snake might slay The man to quench his need: 'Alway Doth hunger break an oath,' they said. Great horror seized the Man, for led By famine came his foe to cast His venom at him.

'Not so fast,'
He shrieked, as with a spring he leapt
Aside, while o'er his heart there crept
A sickly terror, 'would ye kill
The friend who saved you from the ill
That flesh most fears?'

'How now?' replied

The Serpent: 'still unsatisfied Art thou, although the case hath been Twice fairly judged? Full well I ween This is enough!'

XXXI. Strange serpent snare.

'Yea,' quoth the Man,
'Robbers and murderers know to plan
Such things betwixt them. I appeal
From them to one in whom all feel
Most perfect trust. Our gracious King
Shall judge the cause, and whatso thing
His will award 'twixt thee and me
Both shall abide by, finally.'
The Serpent, Bear, and Wolf concurred
To have the case at full referred
To thy great wisdom; vainly thought
These shrews, that if they jointly sought
Thy favour, they perchance might bend
Thy noble soul to serve their end.

"I trow that ye remember well, Great Lord, how this same thing befell, Yet pardon me if I, in short And simple words, tell how the Court They filled with crowds of kith and kin, And how they boldly brought therein The Wolf's two sons (cry void of wool), Called Empty-Belly and Never-Full, Hoping these brats might get some share, If so it happed thy judgment were Against the Man: as creatures mad For hunger howled they, till ye bade The pair to void your Court.

The Man

Stood in great dread, for now his span Of life on thy award did hang.

Then through the Court his accents rang, As he appealed your grace, and told How the base Serpent claimed to hold The oath for nought 'gainst him who saved His life, and eloquently craved Impartial sentence.

Then replied
The Serpent, saying: 'I had died,
'Tis true, within the snare, but how
Hath this Man saved my life if now
I starve for hunger? Thus my claim
Is just, great King, and nought of shame
Lies on me if I break my oath.'

"Then ye, my Lord, were sorely loth To say on which side lay the right: For, if the Man must die, despite The Serpent's oath, although he'd shown Such kindness as is rarely known 'Twixt man and beast, 'twould seem unjust, But yet 'twas clear the Serpent must Have food to save his life. Command Then gave ye, that the skilful hand And brain of learned Reynard should Thereto be set, for wise and good Was he in those old days esteemed, And sound and true his judgment deemed Before all other; and ye said: 'Now be we all by Reynard led, For dowered is he with wit profound, And wotteth all the root and ground Of legal doubts.'

Then Reynard spoke, And in few words did he uncloak And clear the case.

> 'My Lord,' he cried, 186

"By no just mean can ye decide From what these witnesses declare: By one mode only can a fair Award be made: first let the Snake And Man forthwith themselves betake To that same spot where first they met. And when within the snare or net The former once again doth stand In equal peril whence the hand Of kindly pity set him free, Then, should the man again agree To loose his bonds, nor show him loth To trust once more the Serpent's oath, Who should gainsay? But if he will To leave the Serpent bounden still, No man hath right to say that he Therein hath acted blamefully.'

XXXI. Strange serpent snare.

- "'Twas thus that Reynard's wit evolved Clearness from chaos, and resolved This knotty case, which had defied The brains of all thy Court beside.
- "My Lord, that judgment deemed ye good, And all the Counsellors who stood Around deep looks of envy wore, To see that thing, which had before His coming puzzled sore their wit, Made patent, and the Man go quit From death—'twas thus he wisely kept Thine honour, proving him adept In legal lore: this paradox None solved, till sought ye Reynard Fox.
- "When have the Wolf and Bear e'er done To thee like service since the sun 187

First lit your life? To how and brag They know right well, nor do they flag In plunder or dishonest work: And where fat morsels are, they lurk In wait to seize them, and to fill Therewith their paunches. Ever still Foremost are they to scourge small thieves Of hens and chickens, but fat beeves, Milch cows, and horses will they steal. Without a blush, and though they deal Sharp justice towards some petty knave, Yet reckon they as nought their grave Outrageous robberies, whereof quit Too oft they go, and even sit On high as Lords of great estate. And void of doubt or scruple, rate Themselves with learned Avicene. Counting their little wit I ween To equal that of Solomon Or Aristotle.

Every one
Of this base crew would fain be thought
A hero, yet should each be sought,
Not in the van, prepared to face
All dangers, but in some snug place,

Secure from harm.

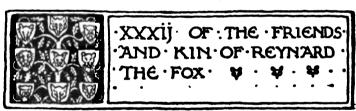
These be not wise, Great Lord, who seek but to devise Their own advantage: tower and town, Lord, land, and people may go down To wrack and ruin, yet their souls Grieve nought thereof. If at the coals They may but warm them, they care not Whose house 'tis burns, one single jot. Self benefit alone they seek.

"But if thou sufferest me to speak Of Reynard's numerous kin and friends I fain would show how each one bends His native wit to serve thee well. It needs not my poor tongue to tell How wisdom ranks above mere boast. Or call to memory that a host Of subtle counsellors is thine In Revnard Fox: no other nine Can equal him, yet scant and small The meed and thanks are that befall The never dying love he feels For thee; but as the morning steals With still sure foot, and driveth night Across the hills, e'en so shall spite And envy fail before the ray Of love, and thou in truth's broad day Shalt thank the Fox, whose faithful care Hath saved thy life from secret snare.

"My Lord, of late I heard thee say
That Reynard's kindred fall away
From backing him because they fear
His falseness: trow I that right dear
Such words had cost another man
Than thee, great King, for short his span
Of joy would be ere on his head
Such wrack and vengeance fell, that dead
He well might wish him. Thou art free
To speak thy pleasure, for to thee
We humbly bend; though should some dare
To scheme thy hurt, let them beware,
For soon the whole Fox kin would show
Such deeds in thy defence as grow
From true and valiant men alone.

"In fiercest fight 'tis freely known They lead the van; no dastard heart Hath with our lineage lot or part. I will, with your most gracious leave. So far as memory serves, achieve The tale of Reynard's kith and kin, Who all with one consentment pin Their faith to what the Fox doth say. And, recking nought, would cast away Both life and goods to serve him. With cheerful heart would gladly die For his dear sake: although a wife And mother, yet should I my life Account well lost; my children three, Well waxen and most dear to me, Would I adventure for his love. Which my true heart doth set above All else men prize.

Great Lord, I pray That wisdom guide your wit this day.



"Y first child Bitelives hath for name: Much cherished is he for the game And sport he makes, wherefore to eat He hath fat trenchers and good meat In such great plenty, that the crumbs His brother Fulrompe feed, who comes Next him in birth. My youngest child

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

A daughter is, by nature wild And tameless; she is called Hatenet, Because from birth she never yet Was known by trammel to be held Against her will. None ever excelled These three in love to one another, And all three love I as a Mother Should love her offspring."

Then the three She beckoned towards her smilingly, And bade them all that they should stand By cousin Reynard; next with bland Soft voice she cried: "Come ye who own Kinship with me and Reynard; none Need blush therefore; 'tis ours to pray The King that he forthwith doth stay Process of law against our good Red kinsman."

Then from those who stood Thickly around came forth anon The black Martron, A worthy heap. The Fitchew, and the Musehont grey, The Bonsing, and the Ferret: they All love the poultry yard as well As Reynard, and are scarce less fell Amongst its denizens; Beavers brown From out their well-built island town Appeared; the Otter and his wife (These and the Beavers were at strife With Reynard, but durst not gainsay Dame Rukenawe, who would fain display The fullest strength of Reynard's kin), The Water-rat, and those atwin, The Genet, Squirrel, and Ostrole (Now known no more), the velvet Mole, The Hedgehog, clad in armour pointed,

XXXII. The droll Fox breed. The Ermine, who to Kings anointed Doth furnish decking, and a score Of others, making somewhat more Than forty, issued forth to stand By Reynard's side, and formed a band That no man need despise.

Then cried
Dame Rukenawe: "Can it be denied
That Reynard hath, most gracious King,
A great and goodly following?
Here in one posse may ye view
The most devoted, loyal and true
Of all your subjects, who at need
Would spend their goods, or freely bleed
In thy defence. Although of might
Ye be in counsel, as in fight,
Yet should the mightiest King be fain
Alliance such as ours to gain.

"Let Reynard ponder in his mind Crimes laid against him; if he find No way thereout by sound excuse, Then on his head may ye let loose The terrors of the Law; bedight Thou justice, and God save the right!"

Then spake the Queen: "But yesterday, With honeyed words, I strove to lay These very things before the King, Which thou, great Dame, with force dost bring Again within his ken, but he Then took my reasoning angrily, And scorned to bend thereto his ear."

Spake too Sir Fyrapeel: "'Tis clear, Great Sire, that as the ancients give 192 Their verdict, so must Reynard live Or die. For shouldest thou decide, Merely by force of mightful pride And wayward will, but scanty praise Would be thy due: keep thou the ways Of perfect justice; duly hear Each side in turn, and void of fear Or favour, ever by the best And wisest counsel act."

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

"Confessed
These words must be for just and true,"
The King exclaimed, "but was not due
Swift censure when the tale I heard
Of Cuwaert's death? Too rashly stirred
Perchance I was to wrath, but dead
To reason felt when Cuwaert's head
By Bellyn I received—yet now,
On calm reflection, will allow
That over hasty was my speech:
Slowly doth sad experience teach.

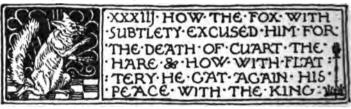
"Once more do we consent to list Reynard's reply, and if I wist The exculpation good and sound, Then would my heart with joy rebound To set him free, and quell the fear Of those who hold their kinsman dear."

These words made Reynard's heart right glad:
"Thank God!" thought he, "Mine Aunt hath clad
Her speech in such fair guise that doom
Is overpast—she maketh bloom
Anew the lineage of the Fox,
Unhurt by Fortune's cruel shocks.
Once more my nimble foot shall tread
The merry dance of life; my head

193

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

Once more shall scheme such glorious lies As well might startle and surprise The sire of leasings. Thus, the King Once more deceived, I'll safely bring My bark through raging storms to port, And laugh to scorn my foes at Court."



Around the Court, as one amazed
At all he heard, then gently said:
"My Lord, what say ye? Is then dead
My good friend Cuwaert? Twice have ye
Thereof made mention, yet to me
"Tis strange and new, shall I no more
Behold dear Cuwaert? And wherefore
Speakest thou thus of Bellyn Ram,
For whose safe coming here I am
Pledged to the hilt? Did he not bring
Three jewels? One for thee, dear King,
And two for our most gracious Queen?"

The King replied: "We nought have seen, By Bellyn brought, save Cuwaert's head A ghastly sight! and as he said, That of the letters, which the scrip Contained, with you in fellowship He was joint author, therefore quick The shafts of vengeance fell, and thick As woes on Job in bygone day."

'Alas!" quoth Reynard, "do ye say
This thing for very truth? Ah woe!
That ever I was born, for lo!
Within that scrip three jewels rare
I sent to thee: past all compare
Are they for beauty, craft and worth;
Cursed be the day that gave me birth
If they be lost! no longer life
Hath joy or savour; when my wife
Doth learn this loss her heart will break,

For in those jewels did she take Such pride that grievously I fear XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

To lose her love. "My nephew dear," The She-Ape said, "ye nought can gain By such deep sorrow; weak and vain Is this lament; cast grief aside, For what availeth that ye chide With puling words?—stand forth and say What form these jewels bore: if they Are still existing on the earth, And treasures are of such great worth, We peradventure yet may find Sure means to speed on every wind The story of their priceless cost: We'll rack the world ere they be lost! The learned Master Akeryn, Shall books indite thereof, and spin Their fame through earth's remotest ways, Telling their likeness, worth, and praise. If even thus they be not found, Then every altar shall resound The Church's curse on those who dare To hold them hidden."

"Untold care, Dear aunt, thou liftest from my mind," 195 XXXIII. Reynard's romance. Quoth Reynard, "for my heart doth find Your cheering words give wondrous ease, Yet doubt if even the mighty keys
St. Peter wieldeth will induce
The shrews who stole those gems to loose
Their hold thereon; the universe
Knoweth no King whose treasure-purse
Contains such precious things as those
I mourn the loss of: pains and woes,
Most cruel, shall I count as nought,
Until, not only have I sought,
But found those jewels, which excel
Aught eye hath seen, aught tongue can tell."

Then in a false dissimuled tone
The Fox cried: "Hear me, every one
Of you my well-loved friends and kin,
And blame my speech unless it win
Your heartfelt sympathy in this
Most bitter loss, which threats, ywis,
To darken all my life. Know ye
The jewels that are lost, all three
Hold virtues heretofore unknown.

"The first a ring was, which alone
Excelled a Monarch's ransom, gold,
Free from alloy as are the cold
Bright ice-born streams, 'twas formed of: writ
Inside the circle, which doth sit
Close to the finger, was a trine
Of letters which, enamelled, shine
With azure, bright as noonday sky,
And sable, whence there seemed to fly
Sparkles of light. These letters were
Three Hebrew names; alas! I ne'er
Could spell that holy tongue, but then

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

I knew that marvel among men Hight Master Abrion of Trier. Than whom no other, far or near, Hath greater learning, well he knows All manner languages, and trows The virtues of all herbs; no beast Doth live, so wild, but at the least Of words from him it will obey All his behests from that first day It comes before him; precious stones, Sought out from earth's most distant zones. He calls by name, and knows to tell Each good effect or evil spell They cause to man, and yet a Jew He lives, and doth despise the true Sound faith of Holy Church. I showed To him this ring, and eager glowed His eyes with fire, the while he read The mystic words, then whispering said: 'These are the names which holy Seth Brought out of Paradise, when death Drew near to Adam, and he sought For him the oil of mercy. Nought Need he who bears these holy names Fear witchcraft, thunder, or the flames Of scorching lightning; though sin tempt His spirit, yet shall he exempt Be kept from stain, and though he lie Long nights afield, he shall abye Unharmed the storms of winter frore. Such virtues and a thousand more These names ave bear to those who on Their power rely—trust Abrion.'

"Withoutforth of the ring, a stone, Of three most wondrous colours, shone;

The one part showed like crystal—red, Bright sparkling, as live fire it bred Within its substance, in such wise, That where 'tis borne the darkness dies, Though round doth reign profoundest night For those who lack its inborn light, While those who know to use its ray Walk sure as though 'twere broad noonday.

"The second part was fair and clear, As though some skilful burnisher Had worked its surface; whose dole Of body feeleth, may be whole Of all disease, or pain or ache, Or falling sickness, if he take This stone and gently strike it o'er The part that suffereth: nevermore Shall sickness touch him till he fall By that last stroke which comes to all. Or should it chance that evil meat Or venom causeth fever's heat To fire his blood, or rheum's sharp pain Should rack his limbs, a man may gain Relief therefrom if he but steep That stone in water, and a deep Long draught drink fasting. **Furthermore**

This dear-worth stone within it bore
Another colour, purest green
Much like to glass, but yet were seen
Therein some purple sprinkles: who
Bare this, the master said for true,
That never in his life need he
Fear wound-stroke from an enemy.
And though most mighty were his foe
And strong and hardy, he alow

Should quickly lay him, whether day
Or night beheld the weapon-play.
But needeth well, whoso would reap
These precious boons, must surely keep
A holy fast the day before.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

"To these great wonders yet may more Be added: wheresoe'er he goes, Who holds this ring, his deadliest foes, Who erstwhile hated him above All others, shall with kindly love Embrace him: soon as in men's sight He comes, each one shall feel delight To greet his hand with kindly grip Of warm and welcome fellowship. Moreover, though he naked stood Within a field against a brood Of mailed foes, a hundred strong, Yet should he cast adown that throng Unaided, winning stintless praise And plenteous love. But herein plays The wearer's birth momentous part, For not alone of noble heart Must he himself be, but his kin Must boast good lineage would he win Behoof and service through this stone, For unto such an one alone Its mystic powers respond, no churl Would vantage gain from this fair pearl Of peerless price.

And then I thought
Within my heart most surely ought
This precious gem to be in care
Of one more worthy than I dare
Esteem myself. To thee therefore,
Great King, 'twas sent, for no man more

Is fit to wear it, or should be Guarded and kept more sovereignly Than thou (who art our very breath) From dread, from need, ill-luck, or death.

"This precious talisman was found Deep-dolven 'neath the darksome ground Among my father's treasure hoard. But list thou further, dearest Lord, What other wonders had new birth From that great storehouse of the earth.

"Thence 'twas with tremulous hands I won Two other glorious things, which none E'er matched or equalled yet: a glass And fair made comb, which overpass All else beside that eye hath seen, And therefore 'twas my lady Queen Should have them, though in truth my wife So loved the twain that no small strife Was bred betwixt us.

Weak and small I feel my speech when I recall The passing wonders of this comb And all its virtues, for the dome Of spacious Heaven shields not the wight Who knows to chaunt its praise aright. 'Tis made and fashioned of the bone Supplied by one rare beast alone In all the world, which hight Panthera (No fabled creature or chimera), Who 'neath the fragrant groves of spice Twixt Ind and the Earthly Paradise Pastures him ever: lusty, fair, And strong is he, and with all rare And varied hues his fell is dyed 200

Of rainbow beauty. And beside All this, a sayour sweet bears he That healeth sickness wondrously. This wot the other beasts right well. And, for that pleasant savoured smell To heal them of their ailments, they Follow Panthera night and day. From out that bone whereof is made This jewel, fragrance doth not fade E'en when Panthera dies: 'tis thin And broad and hard, and ever in One piece remaineth, though 'twere smitten On Vulcan's anvil, or were bitten By great Leviathan's jaw; 'twill not Consume in Hell's fierce fire, or rot E'en in the flood of Styx; though tight And hard of texture, 'tis more light Than down from Cupid's wings. So sweet Its fragrance is, that if it greet The nostrils once of any man, He loves it so that never can He henceforth follow any lust Or joy beside, yet ever must He be thereby of jocund heart, Free from misease, till death's quick dart Recalls him home. The comb is white As snow 'neath moonbeams, and as bright As burnished silver doth it shine. On the hither side, betwixt its nine Greater and smaller teeth, is left A field or space, whereon with deft And cunning skill are carven out Fair picturings, set all about With choice enamelling and gold, Such as no eye could e'er behold Unraptured. Then the field is checked

With sable curiously bedecked
With little golden suns. Unrolled
A legend is thereon of old
Mysterious days, when Wisdom, Might,
And Love each claimed unquestioned right
To Beauty's palm. Hear thou the tale
How Love did o'er all else prevail,
And since that time hath ever ruled
The world, by wit and might unschooled,
Befooling ever, and befooled.

"The story tells of days long past,
When Paris must his judgment cast
'Twixt three great dames of passing beauty,
Who, each to draw him from the duty
Which on him lay of justly deeming,
Proffered rare gifts of such fair seeming
As well might, though of justice fain
As Rhadamanthus, turn his brain
To partial sentence.

Thus the three Were named who strove for mastery:

"Juno, bright spouse of mighty Jove, Venus, the Queen of soft-eyed Love, And Pallas, whose exhaustless store Of wisdom grasps all worldly lore. In turn each claimed the first to be For perfect form and symmetry; And each her beauty's wealth revealed, From folds diaphanous unsealed, Demanding that the untutored eyes Of Paris should adjudge the prize (An apple fair of ruddy gold) To her whom all the world might hold

202

Henceforth as fairest among fair, Past doubt, or question, or compare.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

- "The untaught Paris was a young And simple herdsman, who among Green Ida's rocks and thickets wild Had dwelt, sweet nature's heart-free child. But now three Goddesses confess Him arbiter of loveliness.
- "First, Juno all her witcheries tried To warp his judgment to her side, With glorious promise she would dower Him and his line with unchecked power To rule the world.
- Fair Pallas cried:

 'Paris, wouldst thou in triumph ride
 Above thy fellows, thou mayst learn
 From me such wisdom as may turn
 Thy name from low estate, to live
 In deathless fame: and I will give
 To thee, moreover, power to wield
 Thine arms unconquered in the field
 Throughout thy days, until they close,
 Peaceful and sweet, in death's repose:
 Nay, even though dead, thy name shall ring
 Through time, of wit and arms a King.'
- "Then Venus spoke: 'How hast thou need Of power or richesse, or indeed Of wit or might in arms? Is not Priam thy father, who, God wot, Hath Asia 'neath his rule? Own brother Art thou to Hector, whom none other Could ever vanquish or destroy; And own ye not the high-walled Troy

203

Among ye?

If thou wilt bestow On me the apple, thou shalt know A joy surpassing wealth or power, Or wit or conquest: I will dower Thine heart with that which soars above All these—the gift of woman's love! And to thy fond arms will I give The fairest woman that doth live On earth's wide round—than whom was ne'er One born more sweet and debonair. With this great treasure shalt thou be Richer than rich, for verily A gracious woman, fair and wise, Will be to thee far higher prize Than wealth, or learning, or success In warlike deeds. Let gentleness. With love and peace thy life control Through one good woman, and thy soul Shall need no other thing than this To bring thee joy and perfect bliss.'

"With eager longing Paris heard
The welcome promise which the word
Of Venus gave him, and he cried:
'Say then, how name ye the sweet bride
That hath such worth and goodlihead?
Where shall I seek her?' Venus said:
'Tis Helen, far surpassing Queen
Of sunlit Greece, whose beauty's sheen
Shall bless thine arms, and as thy wife
Shed light and joyance o'er thy life.'

"To Venus straightway Paris gave The golden apple, for she drave With these fair words from out his mind 204 All thought but how forthwith to find His promised good.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

How he was made Queen Helen's spouse by Venus' aid, And how he brought her home to Troy, And how their life sped by in joy And merry sport, is carved within The field in such wise as to win The praise of all men: and the story Stands writ beneath in fullest glory Of perfect pencraft:—mastering love Thus lastly proved to be above The power of riches, arms, or wit, And rode triumphant over it.

"Such was the comb, but thence I pass To tell the story of the glass Or magic mirror, wherein lies Such wondrous virtue as defies All wealth of words to speak its praise.

"Who knows aright therein to gaze,
May ken of whatsoe'er is done
A mile or more around; each one
Of men or beasts who moves a hand
To work his need, or gives command
To others, may be plainly seen
Within its depths: ye well may ween
Therefrom its worth—but more—besides
This marvel, further it provides
Witting of all that men would know
Of deepest lore: great good will grow
Moreover from a glance therein,
To folk who guerison would win
For eyes that suffer prick or smart,
And motes and pearls will thence depart

As though by weird. What wonder then If wrath and sorrow move me when Such loss is mine.

The frame of wood. Wherein this precious mirror stood Was light yet hard, and hight Cetyne: For ave will it endure, I ween. Seeing in water ne'er 'twill rot. And noxious worms will pierce it not: And therefore wise King Solomon, The sacred psalmist's glorious son. God's holy Temple caused to be Lined through with wood of Cetyne tree. Men prized it dear as finest gold, And counted it in days of old Of equal worth with ebony: Whereof King Crompart bade should be (For love he bore that peerless lass, Daughter of King Morcadigas) A horse constructed, and so made Within, that he who unafraid Bestrode it, might in one short hour Travel a hundred miles: the power To work this marvel soon was proved By Prince Cleomedes, who, moved To show his prowess, cried: 'How now! 'Twere well to test this tale I trow.' Sturdy and young was he, and hardy, And ne'er in deeds of daring tardy, For much he loved to hear men own His chivalry and fair renown.

"Across the steed he lightly leapt— Quickly King Crompart forward stept, And turned within its well-wrought breast A pin, when straight, with towering crest, 206

The wondrous beast rose high in air. And, while all watched with awestruck stare. Sped through the window of the hall. Far out of sight, beyond recall, A many miles, before that they Could one short Paternoster say. Cleomedes waxed sore afeard. When now those distant hills he neared, Whose pale blue outline well he knew From far, and great his terror grew Lest ne'er his steed should turn again. But ever riding, he his bane Should meet in unknown lands:—how far He sped, e'er yet his lucky star Decreed him knowledge of the law That ruled the pin-what sights he saw Ere thus he learned the magic horse To govern in his headlong course, And what great joyance filled his heart, When once he knew the mastering art By which to wheel his steed about, And with what loud triumphant shout

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

"Beyond the glass the frame stood out A half-foot broad, all carved about With histories wondrous to behold, Dight various wise—with sunny gold, With moonbeam silver, sapphire blue, Rich cinnabar's vermilion hue, Bright yellow and darkest sable. Nought Was ever yet more rarely wrought Than those six colours; then beneath Each several carving was a wreath, Whereon in sharp-cut letters ye

His loving friends received him back, I leave untold since time doth lack.

Might read each gladsome history
Enamelled. Subtle was the skill
Of him who dight it, nought could fill
Man's mind with more profound delight—
Woe worth the day! now lost to sight.

"Moreover round the framework's border Were deftly carved, in daintiest order. Three serried rows. Of beast and bird Were first and second formed, the third Was tricked with every fragrant flower That blooms in garden, mead, or bower. In untaught hands these works would be Marvels of man's dexterity: For o'er each flower and bird and beast. The craftsman's skill hath framed such feast Of cunning handiwork, that rife Seems petal, hair, and plume with life. But when thou once hadst learned from me The trick-work of their enginery. Then, ever freely at thy will These wondrous carvings had proved still More wondrous, for thy magic words Should in a moment to the birds Give being; sudden, as things alive Should they in emulation strive. With carolling of sweetest sound, Filling all heaven with newly found, Undreamed-of joyance: every throat Chanting its native wilding note. Another magic word, and all The storm of harmony should fall Silent: and quickly pass away, Broken the spell—their little day.

"So with the beasts; whene'er thou wilt

Rouse them to life, the cross-barred hilt Of thy dread sword should smite the frame Lightly, and thou a mystic name Shouldst speak, and instantly 'twould make Their dead inanimate forms to take Quick life, and sense, and ready will To do thee service and fulfil All thy behests: then fair-carved wood Become once more, when thou saw'st good.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

"The flowers likewise, whene'er their tips Were touched or breathed on by the lips Of thy fair Queen, would straight assume Bright hues, and fragrant rich perfume Exhale, as though within one's sight From out a garden's warm sunlight All freshly culled; but when her will It were that they no more distill Sweet fragrance, but to carven wood Return, she then with hardihood Should cast them on the brands to burn, And they by magic would return To lifeless beauty as before—
Their bright hues past, their fragrance o'er.

"Ne'er yet in my poor judgment were Such wondrous, beauteous, costly, rare And precious jewels seen, as these, Which on my soul's low bended knees I sent by Bellyn to my Lord, And now my heart, as with a sword, Is riven to deem such treasures gone For aye, to cold oblivion.

"Among the pleasant stories told Within the frame was one of old

P

Dim days of earth, when freely ran The Horse, unchecked or curbed of man.

"He, lusty grown, well knit and strong, Envied the Hart, who sped along With foot that seemed to chase the wind, While he though swift, must lag behind. Till scheming in his mind how he Might o'er the Hart gain mastery, Thus to a passing herdsman spake:

'If, helped by thee, my foot o'ertake And put to death this light-foot deer, For guerdon thou shalt have to cheer Thy heart, his flesh, bones, horns and skin, To deal with as thou wilt, and win Thereby great good, the while I sate My wounded pride and envious hate Which every day doth aggravate.'

"'But,' quoth the Herdsman, 'how may I Come near a beast that doth defy Thy swiftness?'

Said the Horse: 'Astride My back leap thou, 'twill be my pride To bear thy weight, pursuing so The deer, until in mortal throe He fall out-jaded.'

Swiftly sprang
The Herd across the Horse, and rang
The wildwood loud with echoing cries:
But ever the light-foot Hart defies
Both Horse and huntsman till the chase
Lagged; then the steed cried: 'This wild race
Hath wearied me, and I would fain
Dismiss my burden, and again

Roam as aforetime, wild and free; No longer have I need of thee.'

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

- "'Have need of me!' the Herdsman cried,
 'That may be, but whate'er betide,
 No more wilt thou thy freedom gain,
 But henceforth must the guiding rein
 Obey at will, and on thine head
 Suffer a bridle, and be sped
 Therewith through time, the while my heels
 Carry the spur which ne'er appeals
 To tender flanks in vain. Thy master
 Thou now hast found, and either faster
 Or slower shalt thou go, as he
 Hath pleasure or necessity.'
- "My Lord, see how the Horse thus brought Himself in thraldom, while he sought Another's ill. Thus doth it hap Full oft that he who plans a trap To mar his neighbour is beset And snared within his proper net.
- "Among the sculpturings, too, was found This tale about the Ass and Hound.
- "A Man who owned a fertile stead Loved a small Hound, which shared his bed, Fed daily, from his well-filled plate, On morsels rare and delicate, Sported around with many a trick, And in his loving play would lick His master's mouth.

When daily care Gave place to ease, and in his chair The Man reposed, the dog would lie

Upon his knees asleep, or try With merry gambols to beguile The hours of rest.

But when awhile Baldwin, the patient Ass, had seen How fared the Hound, quoth he: 'I ween 'Tis strange what joy my master takes In this foul cur, while nought he makes Of one who patiently hath worked For his behoof, nor ever shirked The dreariest toil: for me no bed Is e'er prepared, nor am I fed With dainty fare, but e'en must lie On cold damp earth, and nought but dry Hard thistles fall to me for food. The while this useless Hound hath good And savoury trenchers given at will. With patience have I suffered ill, Nor e'er complained, but now no more Will brook this slight, as heretofore, But lay some careful well-schemed plan Whereby with fair-built hope I can Expect my lord's regard and love, Which now he shows this tike above All else around.'

Just then came by
His master, and with will to try
To gain his grace, the Ass upreared
His hoofs against his head, and peered
Straight in his face, with hideous bray,
Then kissed his cheek in self-same way
As woned to do the little Hound.
Back stepped the master with a bound,
And cried: 'Help! help! the Ass is mad!'
Then forth rushed many a serving lad,
And beat his hide till he was fain

To seek his shed, and once again Crop thistles rough, rank weeds, and grass, Content to live as lives an Ass. XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

"In suchlike wise may'st thou requite
Those men, dear Lord, whose rancorous spite
Is shot against their fellows. Where
Asses gain lordship, wondrous rare
It is to find good rule. Small heed
Have such of aught, except to speed
Their own advancement, and the state
Fares ill when losels rule its fate—
May God such woe from us forefend.

"Hearken again how once did wend My sire with Tybert Cat. They swore That good or ill should never more Dispart their friendship, and whate'er They won between them, each should share In equal parts.

While yet was young
Their compact, came a rushing throng
Of hounds and huntsmen: thenceward leapt
The twain, and close together crept
Aside for shelter.

'Whither now,
Dear Tybert?' cried my sire, 'and how
Were't best to flee? We're well espied
And round about on every side
The hunters close us in.'

(Full trust
My Father had in Tybert's just
And true fulfilment of the oath
Whose solemn curse had bound them both
To mutual aid.)

He cheerly said,
'Divest thy mind of doubt and dread,

For well my sack is stuffed with wiles, The poorest one of which beguiles The keenest hunter.'

Tybert sighed
And said: 'Dear friend, ye may confide
Well in your wiles, no doubt; the Cat,
Alas! hath only one.' With that
Aloft he sprang, high up a tree
Thick grown with leaves, where none might see
Or harm him.

Thus my sire was left
In jeopard of his life, bereft
Of Tybert's aid, while many a hound
And hunter rushed close by 'mid sound
Of horns, and hideous cries.

With mocks
And sneers the Cat cried: 'Reynard Fox,
My dearest cousin, pray unbind
Thy sack of wiles, which ye would find
Most helpful—now in time of need!'

"This cruel scoff, and gibing rede,
My father had to bear from one
He trusted, and for whom he'd done
A thousand friendly acts, and nigh
He came to end his life days by
This treacherous trick of Tybert Cat.
Long on his belly lay he flat,
While hounds and huntsmen near him passed,
Then swiftly sped, until at last
He gained a cave, and therein crept:
Judge then, dear Lord, in what way kept
The Cat his pledge!

Alas! e'en now, Full many a traitor lives, I trow, Who heedeth troth but little more Than this false friend: and should, therefore, A deep and deadly spleen possess My heart towards Tybert, 'twere much less Than his desert, but need not tell That ever I love my soul too well Malice to bear. Yet should it hap That ruin like a thunder-clap Befell his life and goods, my heart Would scarcely break thereat. No part Within my breast hath envious hate, But trust the Cat will expiate His past misdeeds by worthier life.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

The flesh doth wage most grievous strife Against the spirit when I think How nearly to destruction's brink The Cat hath brought me, but forgive His falseness though its memory live. For love of God, I seek to be With direst foes in charity.

"Within that frame, too, men may read How from the Wolf a friendly deed Gained scanty thanks.

It happed one day,
On yonder heath a carcass lay
Which once had been a horse: all bare
Of flesh 'twas stript, and none would dare,
Except a ravening Wolf, to try
And make a banquet off such dry
Hard fare. But Isegrym so great
Desire for food felt, that he ate
Three, four or five large bones, nor stayed
To bite or break them, as afraid
To lose his meal, and thus one stack
Across his throat, and neither back

Nor forward would it move; great pain Thereof he found, and sought in vain Some skilful leech to give him ease, Assuring goodly gifts and fees To whosoe'er would take away The offending bone, and thereby stay The hand of Death.

At last the Crane He sought the aid of: 'I were fain,' Quoth he, 'to give thee rich reward And lasting love, shouldst thou afford Some potent remedy, whereby To save my life.'

'Most gladly I,'
Replied the Crane, 'will try my skill.'
And speaking thus, he thrust his bill
Far down the Wolf's voracious throat,
And in less time than one could note,
Pulled forth the bone.

The Wolf aside
In dudgeon started, as he cried,
With wrathful voice, in feigned alarm:
'How now! Thou dost me grievous harm!
Yet I forgive thee, but no more
Try tricks on me, or thou wilt sore
Repent it.'

Quoth the Crane: 'Thy whim Is surely now, Sir Isegrym,
To jest: I prithee, kindly give
Thy promised guerdon.'

'As I live,'
Cried Isegrym, 'but this is good!
'Tis I who suffered, and ye would
Demand reward! 'Tis thou who might
Thank me, that I forbore to bite
Thy head off, when thou didst insert

Thy bill far down my throat and hurt Me past all measure. If indeed One of us two deserveth meed, 'Tis I, who kindly spared to close My teeth upon thee.'

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

Often those
Who gather greatest good, repay
That good with ill. In this our day
When false and subtle traitors rise
To power and profit, they despise
Men of fair worship and estate,
Who salved their woes when need was great,
Yet find excuse to take offence,
Claiming amends on false pretence
Of wrongful deeds.

My Lord, 'twere well If those same men, so keen and fell On others' faults, themselves were free From trespass and obliquity.

"All this and more that hath escaped From out my memory's scroll, was shaped With cunning hand around the glass. He who devised it did surpass All compeers in his power to frame Fair subtle marvels, and high blame Had been my due, if I had sought To hold such gems, but duly thought That thou and thy dear Queen, alone In all the world, could rightly own These kingly treasures.

Men are now So niggard grown, that few, I trow, Of servitors in these days live Who to their Lords have grace to give Such precious gifts.

Past all belief And measure was the o'erwhelming grief That smote my children, when I sent To you that glass, for oft they spent Long hours before it: their delight It was therein to gaze, bedight In fairest holiday array: How little dreamed I on the day I gave to Cuwaert Hare in trust These jewels, that so soon the dust Would be his doom. Alas! I knew, Within the world, no other two In whom I safely could confide, Casting all doubt and fear aside, But him and Bellyn, they my best And dearest friends were. Now opprest With deepest grief am I to think That these dear comrades had to drink Death's bitter cup through me.

I cry

For vengeance most exemplary
On Cuwaert's murderer: and although
Around the wide world I must go
To seek him, I will take no rest
Till he be found, even though the quest
Should be my life's bane.

Well 'tis said 'Murder will out,' and though with dread I speak the word, yet who shall say But what some man stands here to-day Who had a hand in Cuwaert's death? Alas! the worst shrews oft draw breath In comradeship with honest men.

"Most strange it sounded to me when Just now I heard thee, dearest King, 218

Declare that never a worthy thing My father wrought for thine: so great And heavy fall the cares of state That little wonder 'tis if ye Let fall from out your memory Some matters fitting to be kept In sweet embalmment.

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

Strangely crept Oblivion o'er ye when ye spake Thus of my sire. Dost thou then take No count of how (when yet ye were A youngling, and your father bare The sceptre) from Montpelier came My sire, endowed with wealth and fame.

And by all men allowed to be In surgeon's skill and pharmacy

Unrivalled?

Perfectwise he knew Of herbs the value, and their true And full significance, and if Viscose they were, or laxatif. Of right he therefore claimed to wear A robe of silk, and girdle fair Of purple richly wrought with gold About his waist, which clearly told, In words unwritten, his degree In leechcraft's lore and surgery.

"Returning home to court, he found His sovereign sick, and seeming bound For speedy death: thereat his heart Was struck as though a cruel dart Had pierced it through, for ardent love Possessed him for your sire above All other lords, who when he knew Of Reynard's coming, cried: 'All you

2 I Q

Who stand around may hither walk, While I with learned Reynard talk Of life and death; 'then feebly said, With languid voice and drooping head: 'Dear Reynard, sorely sick am I, And daily worsen, prithee try Thy leechcraft on me.' He replied: 'Dear Lord, since thou dost so confide And trust in me, be thou assured That all thy sickness shall be cured Ere long: within this voiding glass 'Tis firstly needful that thou pass Thy water—soon as I have seen Its aspect, I at once shall ween Thy bodily ill.'

Thy father did,
Forthwith, what Reynard's wisdom bid,
For fullest trust therein he placed.
(Too well I know that he disgraced
His later life through evil rede
Of wicked beasts, which oft will lead
Good men astray.) At once my sire
Exclaimed: 'Dear Lord, it doth require,
To heal thy sickness, that thou eat
The liver plucked, while yet doth beat
The heart, from out a wolf whose age
Is seven—this done, my life I wage
To cure thee quickly—else, to die
Must be thy fate.'

The Wolf stood by But uttered never a word. To him The King cried out: 'Sir Isegrym, Ye heard but now what Reynard said, Wilt thou then see thy King lie dead, Or freely yield thyself, and give Thy liver, that thy Lord may live

220

Long years in health?'

'Nay! nay! not so,'
Exclaimed the Wolf, 'for well ye know
My years exceed not five'

My years exceed not five.'
'Away

With him forthwith and I will say,'
My father cried, 'if it suffice;'
Haled to the kitchen, in a trice
The Wolf was opened, and the King
Ate of the liver: straight, new spring
Beamed on his life, and strict command
He gave that, all throughout the land,
The title of Master Reynard should
Be his in token of the good
His wit had worked.

Henceforth the King

Approved my sire in everything He said or did, and forthward he Rode by his side in dignity, While by the royal hands his head With roses fair was garlanded.

"Alas! the worthy works he wrought
Are clean forgotten, or as nought
Accounted, while base ravenous shrews
Usurp the high-seat, and abuse
The posts their arts have gained: all wise
And honest men do they despise
And push unblushingly aback,
Whereby it comes, true lords oft lack
Of right, for men of lowly birth
(Set up as great ones of the earth)
Are void of pity, and will vend
Justice for guerdon: thus they spend
Luxurious lives, on nought intent
But avarice and aggrandisement.

22 I

XXXIII. Reynard's romance.

These base men flatter, fawn and play A thousand tricks in hope that they May thereby please their prince, and gain Their vile behoof through good men's pain. But if they see their prince have need Of their superfluous good, small heed Or care will give to his distress From out their own great plenteousness: E'en so the churlish Wolf stood by Your sire's sick couch unmoved, his eye Tearless, refusing to afford That which alone might save his Lord From death.

Far different had it been
With me: to save my King or Queen
A score of Wolves I fain would see
Perish, and grieve but sparingly.
These things my father did, befell
When thou wert young; their memory well
May fade from thee, or be forgot
Outright—new friends old friendships blot.

"I well bethink me of a time
When thou, dear Lord, wert still in prime
Of youthful joyance. One spring day
With Isegrym I took my way
Across the fields: a well-fed swine
We caught betwixt us: such a whine
And howl he made that soon to death
We bit the noisy beast: the breath
Was scarce from out his body when,
All suddenly, within our ken,
Thou, with our gracious Queen, appeared
From out a grove, and when we neared,
In courteous friendly manner spake,
And bade us welcome. Ye would slake

222

Your hunger, which ye said was great, And prayed that we would separate Our winning equally. 'Pray seat Your Royal selves, and share our meat,' I cried with pleasant cheer and humble Obedient bow; a muffled grumble Of discontent made Isegrym; But I, without regard of him, Exclaimed: 'Dear Lord, take all ye will; To serve thy needs doth but fulfil Our bounden duty.'

Selfish care
Took Isegrym, in partial share
To deal the spoil: he barely gave
To thee a quarter, but with grave
And bold assurance quickly ate
The rest, while I was left to sate,
Through Isegrym's voracious greed,
With half the lungs, my hunger's need.

"To God I humbly make my prayer, That he will leave to Satan's care The Wolf for that most evil deed, Nought is he but a worthless weed, Of meanest lineage basely sprung.

"Ere one a credo could have sung Your share was vanished, and ye fain Had eaten half as much again As he had dealt you—scarce a pause It gave your hunger—then because No more he proffered, up ye lift Your dexter paw, and gave him swift And well-earned blows betwixt his ears (Which from his eyes drew floods of tears), And tare the skin down o'er his sight. Bleeding and howling took he flight,

Like cowering cur; and then ye cried:
'Back! back! thou caitiff hound, provide
Thy King with kindlier hand, haste thou
To bring more meat, or worse, I trow,
Will be thy fate.' Then straightway I
Said: 'Suffer me, dear Lord, to try
If I may help the Wolf obtain
More meat wherewith to make ye fain.'

Ere long returned we with a calf. Whereat ye graciously did laugh With merry joyous heart, well pleased To know thy lack would be appeased With such fair feast, then kindly said: 'Reynard, thy hunting well hath sped! St. Julian! nobly dost thou prove By this fair gift, thy faithful love. This calf, so sleek and fat, no one Shall deal but thy safe hand alone.' 'My Lord,' cried I, 'with right good will! The one half may suffice to kill Thy pangs of hunger, and I ween The second half our gracious Queen Hath clearest right to;—then apart I set the liver, lungs, and heart To feed thy children; bones and head I gave to Isegrym, and fed Myself with nought but shins and feet. Then said ye, 'Reynard, I entreat Thee tell me who instructed ye To carve so well and courteously?'

"'My Lord,' cried 1, ''tis this same priest Whose selfish serving of a feast Hath justly on his head brought down Thine anger, and with blood-stained crown Now sits apart.

XXXIII. Reynard's

In these last days
A many wolves there live, who raise
Their heads against good men and true,
Recking no wise what thing they do
To gain and hold the overhand.
Woe! woe! to that ill-ordered land
Where such things hap. Most grievous fear
Was mine (when I did lately hear
Thee speak) that thou hadst clean forgot
This tale as it had happened not.
But would ye closely oversee
The tables of your memory,
Then doubt I not that ye would frame
Your speech to give me praise—and blame
Award the Wolf.

Have I not seen
The day when no great work hath been
Wrought in this Court until my word
As first and foremost had been heard?

"Beware! though now befalls a time When base men charge my life with crime And evil doing, yet it may So hap that words I speak this day Men will account for true and right 'Fore those of others, when the light Reveals all clearly. I desire Nought else but justice, and require, Alone, that those who charge my soul With hateful deeds and trespass foul, Shall good unbiassed witness bring To prove their words, or else, great King, If my accusers fail to show Sound proof against me, then I throw Their accusation back, and claim A verdict: 'Void of guilt or blame,' 225

Q

By rule of this impartial Court."

"Reynard," the King said, "thy retort Hath reason backed with soundest sense; 'Tis true, this murderous, rank offence Against thee charged, of Cuwaert's death, Was whispered only by the breath Of dark suspicion; true, I know Thereof no more than that dread show Which Bellyn made of Cuwaert's head Drawn from his wallet, all bebled. No witness ventures to declare That in his death thy hand had share—Go therefore free—of murder quit."

"Dear King," the Fox cried, "well doth fit Thy word with justice, may just God Give ye good thank, that ye have trod Herein the path of righteousness. Alas! such grief and sore distress Is mine for Cuwaert's loss, that now Fit speech I lack to tell you how When he and dearest Bellyn went From out my house, so torn and rent My heart was, that I straightway fell In deathlike swoon: now may it well Be seen that this was token clear Of anguish deep: Oh heavy cheer! That thus with woe my soul is cleft, Of friends deprived, of gifts bereft!"

The most of those who stood and heard
The grief and bitterness which stirred,
Or seemed to stir, the Fox's heart,
And noted how his face bore part
With all the inward pangs he felt,
226

Were touched with pity, and did melt
To gentle tears, for all believed
That he in very truth was grieved
Past power of words to speak. The King
Said: "Reynard, suffer not the sting
Of woe to wound thy heart." The Queen
Exclaimed: "Dear Reynard, thou hast been
Most sorely tried, and much it grieves
Thy friends to see how Sorrow weaves
Her web about thee. Cast aside
Thy trouble now, and search the wide
Far spreading world, until ye find
These precious jewels."

So did blind
The Fox's guile both King and Queen,
With praise of treasures never seen
By mortal eye, that fierce desire
And will to have the gems did fire
Their covetous hearts, which well might wot
The vaunted goods existed not
Except in Reynard's fertile brain,
But avarice roused gives folly rein.

The crafty Fox well understood
Their thoughts, and wondrous little good
His heart felt towards them. Masking that,
With head bowed down he tearful sat
As one immersed in grief, then said:
"May God reward your goodlihead
And kindly words in this my woe.
No rest by night or day shall know
My foot, for through the world I'll wend
North, south, east, west, from end to end,
And throughly search. Though all my life
Were spent in travel, toil and strife,
Still would I seek, and lastly know

Where lie those gems—nor slack nor slow Shall be my steps. Should that man dare Who holds them to despise my prayer, Scorn my request, and spurn my might, Then I entreat that thou wilt dight Thy power to aid me; seen, the prize Is yours by gift, and little wise Is he who hugs it. Thine it is Murder and theft to avenge ywis."

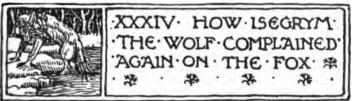
"Reynard," the King made answer, "say Where bides the hoard, and not a day Shall pass ere I unsheathe my sword."

The Fox replied: "Oh! dearest Lord, Thy freehand friendship is too great, Would God that I could emulate Thy generous goodness, and requite With worthy deed thy helpful might."

Now hath the Fox all fast and fair
His matter, and in hand doth bear
The King so safe and sure as he
Scarce dared to hope the case might be.
Such specious leasings hath he made
That now he goes of none afraid,
Save only Isegrym, who spurned
His fluting phrase, and boldly turned
Him towards the King, then proudly said:

"O noble Lord, art thou so dead
To sense as like a child to take
This false shrew's word for truth? Awake
From drivelling dreams, nor suffer lies
To guile thine heart and blind thine eyes.
Long will it be ere snared or trapped
Am I, by one whose life is wrapped
228

In murderous treason, and such crime As doth the Fox's life begrime. He dares to beard thee to thy face With mocking gibes, which bring disgrace On thee, and grieve each true man's ear; Yet leaps my heart to see him here, For now will I set forth a tale Whereat his craven heart must quail, And be thou judge if I or he Speak fairly, well, and truthfully."



229

"IST now, my Lord, with careful heed How this false knave with dastard deed My dear wife's trustful heart betrayed.

"Winter his stern white hand had laid
On land and mere, when forth she went
On journey, and her pathway bent,
Faring with Reynard, o'er a lake;
When quoth he: 'Ersewyn, would ye take
Some goodly fish from out the mere?
Say'st yea? Then sit thee quickly here,
Where, broken through the ice, we see
A fair round hole, wherein may ye
Let fall your tail, thereon will bite
The fish, and when the hairs stick tight
Betwixt their teeth, 'tis yours to whisk
Them forth beside you, free from risk,
While I secure them, on the ice;

XXXIV. The Wolf new cries. Thus lightly winning in a trice A wholesome meal, enough for three.'

"Quoth then mine innocent wife: 'To thee I trust for counsel,' and she set
Her tail deep down, in hope to get
The spoil he promised: but ere long
She found, alas! that in the strong
Hard ice 'twas frozen. He the while
Sat by and watched, until a smile
Broke o'er his face—one second after
Burst from his lips unseemly laughter,
And cried he: 'Dame, why move ye not?
Perchance in some more favoured spot
The fish have keener appetite:
How now! your tail seems frozen tight
Within the ice.'

She tugged and strained All bootlessly, her tail remained As strongly set and firmly held As iron bonds a smith doth weld At clear white heat with sturdy stroke. No word malicious Reynard spoke, But (she fast fixed with tail for tether) Caught from the ice a stray goose feather, And tickled therewith her eyes and face, With mocking grin and foul grimace. And then his unclean paw he claps Athwart her cheeks with stinging slaps, Crying: 'How like you fishing, pray? Hast thou thy fill thereof to-day?'

"Just then I chanced to reach the bank, And looking down beheld the rank And foul offence, which into fits Of anger drove me, till my wits 230 I wellnigh lost. Soon as anear He saw me draw, in dastard fear The wretch slunk off, and death's dark night Escaped by craven-hearted flight.

XXXIV. The Wolf new cries.

"Mv utmost strength would scarce suffice To pull from out the hard-ribbed ice My dear wife's tail, and grievous pain She suffered ere she could regain Full freedom; yea, so hard and fast 'Twas fixed and frozen, that at last A gobbet still remained behind. Whereat she howled like one whose mind Was reft of reason, till the cry Roused from the hamlet built hard by A host of men, with bills and staves, Pitchforks and flails, and rusty glaives, And wives with distaffs armed, a crowd Of half-mad peasants, crying loud: 'Slay! slay! destroy and kill outright The Wolves; and but for friendly night, One long-legged angry knave, who bore A pike wherewith he pricked us sore, Had surely slain us. Many a quean Pursued our flying steps, with keen And angry vengeance, shrieking out That we the culprits were past doubt, Who, in the winter nights, when sleep Had slacked their vigil, stole the sheep. They raged, and swore with many a curse To wreck our lives, but nothing worse Befell us; for our threatened doom We 'scaped by hiding where thick broom And bramble bushes grew, until The storm swept by, and all was still.

XXXIV. The Wolf new cries. "Note well, my Lord, that through this black And treacherous business nought doth lack Of cruel wrong and foul offence Against all law. To mark thy sense Of right and wrong, strike such a blow Against the Fox, that all may know, Throughout the wide and spreading land, Thy rule for just—for strong thine hand."

Cried Reynard: "Sire, if this were true, With reason fair the Wolf might sue For justice 'gainst me, for 'twould smutch My name with infamy, and touch My honour's core; but God forbid That any grain of truth amid His lying words be found. No spark Of conscience binds him. Do but mark How fair and plain a tale I tell; 'Tis true I taught Dame Ersewyn well And deftly how to capture fish, Pricked on thereto by well-meant wish To do a friendly act of kindness, But she, with greed and eager blindness, Which lacked all judgment, forward ran, Rashly neglectful of the plan By me advised, and thrust her tail Beneath the ice; nor did she fail E'en so to catch of fish good store, But longing hungrily for more Than well sufficed—stock still she stayed Some hours—her avarice was apaid By being frozen fast and tight: With tender care, yet strenuous might, I strove my best to set her free: When all at once came suddenly Fierce Isegrym, with grinning teeth

XXXIV. The Wolf new cries.

And angry snarl, across the heath.
Beyond all doubt, his envious eyes
Were dazed by hate, and thus the lies
Given forth by him of what he saw
Are due to error, yet no law
He set upon his lips, but spake
Such words as caused mine ears to ache
With shame and horror; far away
Forthwith I sped, lest he should slay
Or maim me, blind with wrath. Plain truth
Are these few words, nought else forsooth
Shall ever by my mouth be told,
E'en though ten thousand marks of gold
Were falsehood's guerdon.

Time long past
The Fox's lineage hath held fast
The sacred cause of truth. Now prays
Thy servant respite of eight days
With view to seek advice and bring
Such witness forward, that nor King
Nor Queen shall henceforth doubtful be
Of his good faith and honesty.

"What with this Wolf have I to do? Alas! it sends a shudder through My frame to think a wretch so vile And caitiff ever dared to style Himself my friend, as he hath done In days now worn: but here stands one—His wife to wit—whose tongue may soon Convince your minds (if she but tune Its sound aright) how fair and true Is every word I offer you."

Then, high voiced, shrieked forth Ersewyn: "Ah! villain Fox, wouldst then spin

XXXIV. The Wolf new cries. Once more a web of floyting speech
To catch my simple soul, and reach
The King's high favour? Well thou know'st
Leasings to utter and to boast
Thy faith and honour in one breath,
Yet shalt thou lastly die the death
That God's good providence doth send
To traitors—ware thou well the end.
List thou, dear Lord, while I relate
One deed of this vile reprobate.

"Within the confines of the town Is seen a well, where up and down Two buckets work with pulleys, so That when one towards the top doth go, The other sinketh dark and deep. Passing, I heard one sigh and weep, And peering down saw thou didst sit. Base Fox, alone within the pit. Consumed with mortal fear and dread. I asked what ailed thee, and ye said That thou (with greediness accurst) Had eaten fish till nigh to burst, And thus within the well wert caught. I proffered help, and ye besought That in the bucket I would spring Which hangs above, and so might bring Thee timely aid. I scarce need tell That, leaping in, forthwith I fell Down to the bottom, while ye rose Atop as swift as pennon goes Up to the masthead. Then ye sprang With light foot on the sward, and rang Loud laughter from ye, while ye cried: 'Dear Aunt, 'tis thus it doth betide Throughout the world, one man doth go

XXXIV.
The Wol

On high, his fellow falls below.'
With this base gibe, away ye went
And basely left me all day pent,
Hungry and cold, in that dark pit."

Exclaimed the Fox: "'Twere far more fit That thou shouldst suffer thus than I. My dearest Aunt, for verily On one of two the stroke must fall. Pardon me, pray, if I recall The fact that herein much of good I taught thee: namely, that one should Take heed that ne'er in haste he trust His fellow man, for few are just To brother, cousin, eme or friend, But rather seek some selfish end. All Adam's sons who be not blind Strive ever, day and night, to find Their own advantage, and a fool Alone forgets this golden rule Of life, whenso it haps that he Sees life or goods in jeopardy."



·XXXV· A FAIR FABLE·
·OF·THE·FOX·AND·THE:
·WOLF· & · & · & ·

"Y Lord," Dame Ersewyn cried, "I pray
That well ye mark the specious way
This thief doth talk, and how he knows
To shift, with every wind that blows,
His crafty speech, and seem so fair
That e'en the wisest men scarce dare
To contradict him. Thus hath he

XXXV. The Ape's pleasance. Done many a hurt and scathe to me."

The Wolf exclaimed: "He once betrayed Me basely to an Ape, and made Me lose thereby one half mine ear. I leave the Fox to give a clear Succinct account of what befell." "Yea," Reynard cried, "I that can tell Without a stammer, blink, or fault, Or need to hesitate or halt One single moment.

Through the wood
Came Isegrym, and said that food
He sorely lacked—but sooth to say
I never yet have known the day,
Howe'er well fed the Wolf might be
But what he hungered ravenously
For more and more. Where goes the meat
This all-devouring beast doth eat
Surpasses thought.—See now! a grin
Of eager hunger doth begin
To wrinkle up his face.—

When he
Complained and whined thus bitterly,
I, too, for pity, feigned great lack
Of food to suffer; so, to track
Some prey, we wandered far and wide
Long weary hours, but nought espied.
Most sorely then he wept and whined,
And sware no longer had he mind
To scour the woods. Just then I saw
A huge hole, 'neath a spreading haw,
Set thick with brambles, and a sound
Rushed thence that seemed to shake the ground.
'Dear Isegrym,' quoth I, 'go in
And try if something ye can win

From out this cavern; well I wot There may be food therein.'

XXXV. The Ape's pleasance

'Nay! not
For twenty marks,' quoth he, 'I'd creep,
Risking my life, within that deep
And dread abyss, unless I knew
What thing it holds. 'Twere well that you
Should enter first, while I abide
Beneath this tree till ye have tried
How lies the land: far more than me
Can ye deal well and subtilely.
Danger he thrust me on, poor wight!
E'en as a dastard in the fight
Sets one before him. He, though stout
And hale and strong, abode without,
Watchful of what might next betide,
Nought recked he though his friend had died.

"Within this loathly cave such pain Oppressed my soul as ne'er again Would I, for wealth untold, endure. I entered boldly, and with sure, Firm, hardy foot advanced along A straight dark passage, till a strong Bright light burst on me from the side, And turning thither I descried A roomy vault, wherein there sat A gruesome beast—a great Mercatte, Baboon, or other monstrous ape, I trow not which, of hideous shape And giant form, with huge round eyes That glimmed like fire; of monstrous size Her mouth was, set with long sharp teeth, Which like dread daggers bare of sheath Shone forth whene'er she spake! like flails Her shag arms seemed, and such long nails XXXV. The Ape's pleasance. Her hands were furnished with, as strake Fear to my heart, and made it quake, Dismayed and horrified. Ne'er yet In all my life-days have I set Mine eyes on beast so foul. There lay Three children near to her, and they Were hideous as their dam. Such fear Crept o'er me when they came anear That nothing durst I speak but good, Else had they, past all likelihood, Rushed on me rudely, four to one, When shortly had I been fordone And killed outright.

Ouoth I: 'Dear Aunt.

It doth past words my soul enchant
To wish you all good luck this day:
And are these lovely children, pray,
Your own? my cousins? I will gage
That never finer of their age
Were seen on earth: Lord God! how fair
Each one doth look, as he were heir
To some great King. We ought of right
To con ye thanks, who thus have dight
Our lineage with such fair increase:
No sooner heard I from your niece
That thou with yet a babe wert blest,
Than irksome to me seemed all rest
Till I had paid the cradle call.'

"Quoth she: 'Dear Nephew, good befall
To thee and thine: well is thy name
Renowned for rectitude: thy fame
For truth doth ever cause thy kin
Great worship and high praise to win
Where'er they go. Pray wouldst thou teach
My children three, that they may reach
238

XXXV. The Ape's pleasance.

To virtue fair as thine?' Right pleased Was I to hear these words, which eased My heart of fears. A goodly thought It was to call her 'Aunt,' though nought Of sib or kin she was to me:
My Aunt by consanguinity
And right, is good Dame Rukenawe;
Yet quoth I: 'Aunt, as binding law
Thy wish doth count: at thy command Is all I have of goods or land,
And ready is my heart to show
Thy children all the Fox doth know
Of wisdom's deep and subtle ways.'

"Quoth she: 'Thy kind consent betrays
Thy noble gentleness of heart.
But think not, nephew, to depart
Till thou hast eaten. An ye did
My heart would fear some ill betid
Betwixt us twain.'

Therewith she rose
And led me where hung bucks and does,
Fat pheasants, partridges, and hares,
And meats befitting one who fares
In sumptuous fashion every day.

"Awhile I stared at this array
With wondering eyes, then took my fill
Of choicest food with right good will.
Quoth then the Ape: 'Take this fat hind
To cheer thy wife, with my most kind
And hearty love:' she lastly bade
I should not let our friendship fade
To nothingness, but soon again
Return.

Judge well that I was fain 239

XXXV. The Ape's pleasance. To make my exit thus well sped.
On passing forth, I found, half dead
And groaning sorely, Isegrym,
And asking how it fared with him,
He moaned: 'Ah! wonder 'tis I live.
Dear nephew, can your hand not give
Some nouriture, or must I die
For hunger?' Then most readily
I gave him every scrap I had
And saved his life. Therefore most sad
It makes me now to note how he
Demands my ruin constantly.

"Quickly he swallowed down the hind, Then quoth he: 'Reynard, did ye find Nought else of food within that hole? For, as fierce fire well fed with coal Burns ever fiercer, so my teeth But sharpness gain from what beneath Their edge has fallen.'

I quick replied,

'Dear Eme, I prithee haste inside
That yawning gap: of goodly stuff
Thou there wilt see stored up enough
E'en thy huge appetite to daunt.
There dwells an Ape, whom called I Aunt
To win her grace. If thou wilt spare
To tell the truth, and speak her fair,
So may'st thou have thy full desire
Of meat till such time as ye tire
Your jaws with eating. Nought but lies
Will please her fancy; he who tries
Aught else will speedily repent
His folly.'

Thus, my Lord, he went Inside the hole well-warned, but rude 240 Ill-mannered beasts are always crude And rough of speech, with little mind To understand how well-refined And subtle words will work.

XXXV. The Ape's pleasance.

He said:
'Fear not, the Mercatte shall be fed
With such fair leasings as ne'er yet
Men heard.' But he no sooner met
The evil favoured beast inside,
And scanned her children, than he cried:
'Avaunt! ye foul-faced imps of Hell!
What devil's spawn are these? 'Twere well
To drown them out of hand, their sight
Causeth mine hair to stand upright.'

"'Sir Isegrym,' exclaimed their dam,
'These are my children, and I am
Proud of my offspring. One hath been
But lately here, who nought hath seen
But fairness in them, and I trow
Far worthier judge was he than thou:
For he could boast our kith and kin,
And plainly vowed that cherubin
Were they for beauty.'

Answered he:

'Well, let that stand as that may be, But say, afford ye any meat? For I am starving, and would eat Gladly some food; thereto my right Is far beyond each ghastly wight Thou call'st thine offspring.'

Loud cried she:

'Vile Wolf, is here no meat for thee.'

"'Thou liest,' he said, 'behold enough For any ten,' therewith the rough

24 I

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XXXV. The Ape's pleasance.

Discourteous beast essayed to make His way towards the food and take His fill thereof; but straight the four Attacked him tooth and nail, and tore His head and ears, till o'er his eyes The blood streamed down. With fearful cries And hideous howls he rent the air, But, like a dastard, did not dare To make defence, but basely ran In terror wild until he wan The light of day; his coat to-torn His visage furrowed, and half beshorn His dexter ear. About his head The skin hung down, and stark bebled Was all his body. Loud he groaned, And, wailing piteously, bemoaned His grievous plight.

Quoth I to him:
'Did ye well lie, dear Isegrym?'
Quoth he: 'As I beheld, I spoke.
Dost thou suppose that such foul folk
From me should win fair words?'

'Dear Eme,'
Quoth I, 'thus have ye, as 'twould seem,
Reaped just reward. Ye should have said:
'Fair niece, what glorious goodlihead
Have thy sweet children; radiant grace
Shines forth in each sweet comely face:
In faith it makes my heart feel proud
To think that I may be allowed
To call them cousins; would that I
Could boast so fair a family.'
He answered: 'Liever would I hang
Than kinship claim with such a gang
Of misformed Apes.'

'Ye must deceive

XXXV The Ape's pleasance.

Such folk with cozenage, or receive,'
Quoth I, 'such payment as I see
By thine estate hath happed to thee;
More fitting 'tis at times, forsooth,
To deal with lies, than speak plain truth,
For many a man the world hath seen
(Richer and wiser far, I ween,
Than we poor wights) who thus hath done.'

"Dear Lord and King, the Wolf thus won His ruddy coif. Here now he stands With innocent mien, as though his hands Knew nought of harm. Demand, I pray, If he can this plain tale gainsay."



·XXXVJ·HOW·ISEGRYM· ·PROFFERED·HIS·GLOVE· ·TO·THE·FOX·TO·FIGHT· ·WITH·HIM· # · # · #

THE Wolf said: "I with scorn forbear
Thy mocking japes, and have small care
Of that most foul and venomous speech
With which thou darest to impeach
My faith and honour. Ah! strong thief!
Deem'st thou the King will give belief
To thy waste words? Ye falsely said
That when anhungered and nigh dead
Thou saw'st me, thou didst help my need;
But well ye wot thy selfish greed
Nought gave me but a bare-stripped bone,
Whence every scrap of flesh was gone
Down thy fell throat. With churlish mock
Ye strive to make a laughing-stock

XXXVI. The Wolf defices. Of me, as here I stand, and say
That o'er my countenance doth play
A hungry grin: that charge doth touch
My worship closely; and too much
Didst thou presume when, prompt by spite,
Thou saidst that I and Bruin dight
Some fearful plots, whereof none know
(With hoardings hid at Hulsterlo),
Against our Sovereign Lord the King.

"Yet more: ye basely dared to bring My well-loved wife to depth of shame, And hast on her fair spotless fame Cast venomous slander. Did I not Avenge on thy foul head the blot Thus cast upon my scutcheon, I Should merit good men's contumely. I have forborne thee long, but now One of us twain the knee must bow As vanquished; thou shalt not escape My vengeance longer; Hell doth gape With ready mouth to gulp thee in, Thou faggot, wrought of guilt and sin.

"Before my Lord, and all men here
In conclave met, a murderer
And traitor false do I proclaim
The Fox, and gage to prove the same
'Mid fair-set lists in open field,
Body to body; thereby sealed
Shall be our strife, fought out to end;
I cast my glove, and God defend
That man who hath the right!"

Then took

The Fox the glove up, but he shook With abject terror, for he thought:

"My cunning now will count for nought Against the Wolf in open war. Already in mine ear the roar Of victory soundeth when at last He triumphs—but the die is cast."

XXXVI. The Wolf defies.



·XXXVIJ · HOW · THE · FOX · TOOK · UP · THE · GLOVE; AND · HOW · THE · KING · SET · THEM · A · DAY · AND · FIELD · FOR · TO · COME · AND · DO · BATTLE · I

UT." thought the Fox, "I yet may gain Advantage o'er the Wolf, sharp pain He still must suffer, for his paws Are scarcely healed wherefrom the claws Were lately reft, when he with rude Brute force was ruthlessly unshoed At my behest." And then aloud, He vaunting cried: "If any proud Bold man dare rashly to aver The Fox a thief and murderer. Or traitor towards his Sovereign Lord. I say he lies! and will accord For combat place and time to him; And thou, 'fore all, O Isegrym, Shalt at my hand sure vengeance taste: With what fierce joyance shall I haste To meet thee in the lists: my pledge See here; and all thou dost allege Against me will I prove to be Falsehood and basest perfidy."

Then did the King from each receive His plight, and gave his gracious leave XXXVII. The Fox must fight. To set the battle—day and place—Where the two foemen, face to face, Should join in mortal strife, and both Gave borrows as a pledge of troth That on the morn should they appear, And, void of craven-hearted fear, Do deadly battle. Borrows were For Isegrym, the Cat, and Bear; And Reynard ne'er good surety lacks While Bitelives breathes, and Grymbert Dachs.



XXXVII) HOW DAME RUKEN:
AWE THE SHE APE COUNSEL:
LED THE FOX OF THE WAY HE
SHOULD BEHAVE HIM IN THE
FIELD ACAINST THE WOLF I

'HE She-Ape said: "Dear Reynard, see That on the battle-day ye be Thine eme once taught Cool, calm, and wise. To me a prayer which each man ought To know who arms him to the fight. A learned clerk it was who dight The precious words, long years ago, Lord Abbot hight of Baudelo: He said that whoso prayed this prayer Fasting, need feel nor dread nor care Of any foe he met that day; Let not the Wolf, therefore, affray Thine heart: to-morrow will I teach These words to thee; let fear not bleach Thy cheek in doubt to hold thine own."

"Dear aunt, the kindness thou hast shown," Replied the Fox, "doth fire my heart 246 With newborn strength to play my part. My quarrel 'gainst the Wolf is just, And therefore feel assured I must Have good success."

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

Then through the day
The Fox-kin sought to while away
The time with song and merry jest,
While Reynard's aunt her wit addressed
To seek how further she could serve
Her nephew, and his spirit nerve
To meet his foeman.

First, with care Past praise, she shaved all clean the hair From off his body, which with oil She then anointed, that his toil The Wolf might lose if he should try To hold a foe as slippery And smooth as any pike or eel. Moreover said she: "Would ye deal In cunning wise to foil your foe, List well my counsel, while I show The means thereto. Your thick brush tail, Well steeped in eisel, never fail To strike the Wolf with, o'er the eyes, Whene'er ye may, but otherwise, Your brush keep 'neath you, lest he try To catch and hold it, and thereby Obtain the vantage; let your ears So flat lie down that nought appears His claws can seize on: at the first Pretend to flee, as though ye durst Not stand before him; let him run And spring about till nigh fordone: Then to the windward haste ye quick, And with your forefeet raise a thick Dark cloud of dust, to leeward blown

247

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

'Twill blind his eyes, as thickly sown As winter snow-drift: while his sight He strives to clear, thou well may'st bite And wound him past thy heart's desire: And then while rage his soul doth fire, Again, and yet again, thy tail Strike in his visage like a flail, And thereby cause his eyes such woe, That driven to madness will he go Round, round, and round, yet fail to find Your footsteps, being wellnigh blind. So let him run till he be spent And wearied out, his reason rent With savage wrath.

Behold my rede
Good nephew mine, God give you speed;
Yet one word more: to gain success,
Prefer thou ever craftiness
To rude brute strength, and therefore set
Yourself to think how ye may get
Advantage by ingenious ruse,
The while the Wolf doth madly use
And spend his vital force.

Now list
The holy spell, which doth consist
Of six most precious words, and these
Must thou say fasting, on thy knees:
'BLAERDE . SHEHAY . ALPHEINO,
KASBUE . CORSONS . ALBUFRIO.'
Nephew, be sure, this charm well said,
Kind Heaven will watch and guard thine head;
Further my counsel is, 'twere best
That thou shouldst gain some peaceful rest,
For shortly hence will break the morn,
And 'twere not well your strength were worn
With vigil ere fierce war ye wage

With Isegrym; I will engage To break thy rest betimes."

"Dear aunt,"

The Fox exclaimed, "My Matin chant Shall be deep fervent thanks to thee For thy most sweet benignity.

Alas! One thing alone doth wear My mind, which is, that I can ne'er Have power to recompense or pay Such love until my dying day.

Assured within my heart I feel That safer guard than hauberk's steel Are those most holy words to charm My life, and ward each deadly harm."

Then in a pleasant grass-grown bent, He stretched him 'neath a bush, and spent With all his labours, found such deep, Untroubled, and refreshing sleep As those enjoy who have a sense Of pure unblemished innocence, Or those who, steeped in whelming crime, Reckless of all, but bide their time.

No longer lay he, than till white
Thin eastern streaks proclaimed that night
Waxed old, for then the Otter came,
Crying: "Dear cousin, it were shame
Longer to lie this summer morn,
And trow I well ye scarce will scorn
With this young duck to break thy fast;
To win it for thee have I past
Through many a danger."

Reynard cried:
"Well might ye count me quite beside
My wits if this good hansel were
249

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

XXXVIII. Dame Rukenawe's shield, By me disdained, such dainty fare
Is more than welcome: warmest thanks
Be thine, dear friend: no creature ranks
Kind deeds more highly than the Fox,
And should my life escape the rocks
And shoals that now appear ahead,
Fair guerdon shall on thee be shed
For this kind gift."

The duck he ate
With appetite that would not wait
For bread or condiment, then went
With stout heart battleward, while rent
The air with many an echoing shout,
His kin and friends, in revel rout.



THE King beheld with wondering eyes
The oiled and shaven Fox; surprise
Gave way to laughter, and he said:
"Eh! Fox, now swear I by mine head,
That well thou knowest thyself to dight
When thou wouldst foil a foe in fight,
Yet verily is thine aspect foul."

The Fox returned nor smile nor scowl, Nor spake one word, but lowly kneeled To King and Queen, 'fore all the field, And then addressed him to his place. The Wolf, with grinning, angry face, Spake many a proud and vaunting word, 250

Which all unmoved his foeman heard. The Leopard and the Losse, who kept The lists between them, forward stept With book in hand, and thereon sware The Wolf, who pledged his oath to tear The mask from off the Fox, and prove On his fell body, that nor love Nor fear had he for King or Queen, But ever through his life had been

With murder stained, and treason high Had plotted 'gainst his Majesty.

XXXIX. The Fox well dight.

The Fox made oath the Wolf had lied Most falsely in his throat, and cried: "Believe, no man, this knave and thief! To me 'tis verily a grief To enter lists with one so vile, But trust that gracious Heaven will smile On my emprise, and grant me might To cast him down to Hell's dark night."

This done, the lords who ruled the fray Called on the combatants to stay All further speech, and boldly stand Forth to do battle, hand to hand.

Then all folk roomed the field except Dame Rukenawe, who closely kept Beside her nephew, and with care Bade him hold fast in mind the fair Good rede she learned him."

"Well I know,"

Quoth she, "how ye had wit to go, When ye but seven years were of age, Unlit by lantern, and engage On darkest nights, devoid of moon, To gather good, or win some boon

25 I

XXXIX. The Fox well dight. Your household needed. Thus your name For craft is honoured. Now new fame And worship will to thee arise If thou in battle bear the prize."

"My dearest aunt, in hour of need,"
Replied the Fox, "ye far exceed
All other redemen, and I hope
By memory of thy love to cope
In combat with my cruel foe
In such good wise that Fame may blow
The Fox's glory far and wide."

"Dear nephew," quoth she, "'tis my pride To hear thee speak such words, and trust In Heaven to aid the true and just.



XL HOW THE WOLF & THE FOX FOUGHT TO: GETHER + + + + +

THEREWITH from out the field she went.
Each combatant stept back, intent
To see whence first the stroke might come.
From out the crowd arose a hum
As Isegrym trod forth and oped
His long fore legs, 'twixt which he hoped
To catch the Fox, but he aside
Sprang lightly, and with nimble glide,
Went straight between his legs: then next
Round went the Wolf, most sorely vext
Thus to have missed his mark, and chased
His foe with rapid strides who faced

XL. Fought is the field.

Him ne'er about, and though he oft O'ertook the Fox, and raised aloft His foot to strike him, he with swift And skilful movement would uplift His tail, and therewith deftly smite The Wolf across the eyes, till, sight Obscured by grievous pain and smart, Hither and thither would he dart, And strive meanwhile to clear his eves: This Reynard sees, and quickly flies To windward, where the sandy dust In clouds he raises, and each gust Straight blows it in his foeman's face. Who finds no single moment's grace To wash his eyes, and clear his sight: Then, ere that he can see aright The Fox leaps on him from behind. And cries: "Ah! thief! art thou now blind?" Then next, inspired by wrathful spite. He hastes three grievous holes to bite Between his ears, then loudly screams, "How fares it with you now? meseems Thou hast been wounded on the head: Rest thankful that ye be not dead, As yet may hap. How many a lamb Have ye destroyed? and Bellyn Ram? Did ye not eat him? Falsely thou Hast here appealed me, but I trow Most bitterly for this shalt pay; Ordered and pre-ordained to-day Am I to be thy bane—no more Will God permit thee, as of yore, To ravin, pillage, rob and lie, But hath appointed graciously (For safety of thine eternal soul) Me to assoil thy sins, and toll

XL. Fought is the field.

Thy passing bell: prepare to die!
Fierce Hell shall be thy purgatory!
But stay—within my mercy lies
Thy life, and if that life ye prize,
Kneel down and beg that I forgive
Thy many crimes, and let thee live:
Avow thy mighty strength o'ercome,
And I will show to thee that some
Of pity's sweetness doth remain
Within my heart, for loth to stain
My hands am I with blood—God wot!"

These mocks made Isegrym wax hot With wrath wellnigh to bursting: ne'er Could he have deemed the Fox would dare To speak such words; and when at last His scattered thoughts came back, he cast About within his mind how yet He might once more the mastery get.

With one vast effort then he broke From 'neath the Fox, to whom a stroke He gave, like axe-blow on the head: Down dropped his foe, and lay as dead One moment; now most surely thought The Wolf that lastly he had caught The wily Fox in death's embrace, But up he leapt, and once more chase He gave him o'er the field, and then Again they battled as two men Who war for death; ten times the Fox Was caught, and e'en as one who locks His arms around his love or friend, Isegrym grasped him, but the end Was ever that his well-oiled skin Enabled him again to win

XL. Fought is the field.

Escape and freedom. Oh! so snell The Fox was, that when weened right well The Wolf to hold him, sudden start He gave, and arrow-like would dart Betwixt his legs; and then a cuff Would deftly deal him with his rough Well-eiselled tail across the eyes, And ere from out his dazed surprise He woke, a second stroke would fall, And then a third, and after all These buffets, he would run and raise The dust in clouds, and therewith craze And blind the Wolf; but yet his strength Exceeded Reynard's, till with length Of warring was the Fox nigh done.

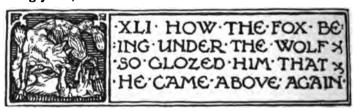
Sore anger'd was the Wolf, that one He so despised should thus outlast His force of arms, and thought, "One cast Will I attempt," so lay in wait, Till Reynard rushed upon his fate, And one great blow, that caught his head, Caused him to drop benumbed, as dead, And Isegrym, like lightning, bound His arms in firm-locked grip around The Fox's body, and then lay So heavily on him, that no way Could he get free, but life and breath Were nigh pressed out, and grimly death Glared in his face.

Then sore afraid Waxed Reynard's soul, and heavy weighed The hearts of all his friends; but glad, Yea, overjoyed were those who had Fixed faith in Isegrym.

With fierce 255 XL. Fought 15 the field.

And venomous snaps did Reynard pierce The Wolf's tough hide, but tooth and nail, Though sharply worked, could not avail To loose his foeman's grip; his teeth Fain would the Wolf use, but beneath Him so far lay his small made foe, He scarce could reach him.

Then did grow
Death-horror in the Fox's mind,
Till, in despair, he made a blind
Last effort and with both his paws
Reached Isegrym, and then, his claws
Fixed firmly in his head, he tare
Across his brows the skin and hair,
Scratching his eyes till one hung out,
Whereat he bellowed forth a shout
Of rage and pain, then howled and wept,
While all adown his visage swept
Full streams of blood in stintless tide,
Till earth's green sward was crimson dyed;
And round that spot nought else there grew,
Long years, but flowers of roseate hue.



O clear his ken the Wolf must lift
His feet, and thus was forced to shift
His grip of Reynard, whom a beam
Of fair hope cheered like sunlit gleam
Through clouds, for while his injured sight
His foeman cleared he sprang with light
256

Quick leap from 'neath him:

XLI. The Fox nigh lost.

"Nay! not so Shalt thou thus save thyself, and go Free of my vengeance," Isegrym Exclaimed, and starting after him-Though bled he sore the while—he caught Him once more 'twixt his arms, and sought His soul from out its house to press; And past all doubt in sore distress The Fox now lay, for as beneath The Wolf he fell, atwixt his teeth His foe secured his paw, then cried: "Despite all arts that thou hast tried, Now is thy life within my power, And thou no more shalt on me shower Vile sand and dust; thine eiselled tail No more shall 'gainst mine eyes avail, Nor evermore shalt thou beguile Mine ear with specious words, no wile Can aid thee further. Times gone by Most gross and grievous injury Thine hands have done me; nay! e'en now Mine eye hast thou destroyed, and trow I well that many a grievous wound My body bears. Though thou entuned Thy floyting speech to charm mine ear, 'Tis all too late, nor love nor fear Shall give me pause again."

Now stood

257

The Fox in gloomiest fear; for good Or evil ending must he choose, Whether without more words to lose His life forthwith, or subtly try Once more smooth-tongued cajolery. Short space it took him to decide That useless 'twere to mock or chide

S

The bitter foe, whose fury held His life in scale, and therefore quelled All japes within his breast, and fair And softly spake, as though he were The Wolf's best friend. Quoth he:

"Dear eme,

All past misdeeds will I redeem Without reserve, and be your man, To serve you through what little span May yet remain to me of life. All evil dealings towards thy wife With heartfelt sorrow I repent. Would God my dregs of life were spent In wending towards the Holy Grave Pardon to gain for thee, and crave From shrines throughout the Holy Land Rich gifts, which I with generous hand Would give thy cloister—profit rare Souls thence derive, and thine shall share (Yea, and thy father's too) the boon. I trow that ne'er since sun and moon First shone, such offer hath been made To any King; and thou obeyed Shalt be as though the Pope ye were, Our Holy Father. Whatsoe'er I have henceforward will I hold Of thee, and 'neath thy flag enrolled Shall be my lineage, kith, and kin; Thus shalt thou foremost honour win, Lord above Lords: what King should then Dare to withstand thee, seeing my men Increase thy forces? Furthermore, I promise whatsoever store I take of poultry, wild or tame, Or fish or flesh, or woodland game, Thou and thy children shall have choice

Ere I partake thereof; thy voice Shall be my law whatso betide. As trusty guardian, near thy side Will I keep ward, that never scathe May touch thine head, for late and rathe Shall be my watch.

Bold, stout, and strong Art thou, while I, through all the throng Of men and beasts, am formed for wile, So with thy strength, and my fertile And subtle brain, could none withstand Emprise whereto we set joint hand. Besides, so close we be of kin. That past all doubt 'twere deadly sin If 'twixt us cruel war had place. Nay, could I but have found a case For good excuse, I had not fought This field against thee; thou 'twas sought The quarrel first; so little will Had I to injure thee that still While fighting have I striven to show Fair courteous bearing towards thee, though A mighty difference had men seen If so it happed that I had been Pitted against a stranger. Thou My dear eme art, and well I trow A nephew's duty. When I might Have seized a time perchance to smite, I stayed mine hand, or thou hadst not Escaped with such slight wounds, I wot, In this encounter. True your eve Hath somewhat suffered, and a sigh Escapes my bosom when I think That thou, dear eme, hast had to drink That draught of woe: oh! would that it Had fallen on me, for much more fit

It were that I should suffer, but It bears advantage—most men shut Two windows when they sleep—while one Thou wilt but need to close.

Well done
It were, 'fore all men, shouldst thou deem
These words well spoken, dearest eme;
With heartfelt gratitude my wife
And children would for thy dear life
Make instant prayer, and falling down
Before thy feet, beg Heaven to crown
Thy days with joy.

I here confess
The trespass, lies and naughtiness
That I 'gainst thee and thine have wrought;
But say, could any Lord have aught
More noble than I proffer now
With meek submission, as I bow
My soul for mercy. Well I wot
That thou my life may'st lightly blot
This moment, but, and if thou didst,
Consider how thou dwell'st amidst
My friends and lineage, who would take
Vengeance on thee for kinship's sake.

"That man may well be counted wise Who doth not let his anger rise Against his own advantage. Some There be who suffer wrath to come Betwixt them and their own behoof; Such action clearly ranks as proof That 'tis not wisdom's sceptre rules Their lives, for needs must they be fools Who suffer passion to o'erride Their wit, what thing soe'er betide. Dear eme, 'tis surely little gain

To any victor that he stain
His laurel crown with foeman's blood,
Sweet mercy oft breeds brotherhood.
Much better should a man have peace
And rest, and honour, than increase
Of foes who ever lie in wait
To seek his hurt. My wretched fate
I reck no whit, and do but give
Good rede, how thou may'st glorious live."

"Ay, thief!" the Wolf said, "thou wouldst fain Be once more free, that yet again Thou mightest scathe me. Wot I well That wert thou loosed, the broken shell Of one frail egg thou wouldst not reck Of me or mine, but now in check I have thy life. Though thou didst hold In fee a world of ruddy gold, Piled high as yon grey mountains old, I would not spare thy life for gift Thereof, too well I wot the drift Of thy fair speaking. Nought I set By all thy kin, and should not fret To call them foes. Ere thou wast born I knew to choose 'twixt chaff and corn.

"Thy glozing speech thou might'st have said To one who knew thee not, and bred Therewith repute for love of truth And honest ways. But since thy youth Thy devious way of life have I Known to be vile and dastardly. Yea! with good reason might ye mock With gibing laugh should I unlock Mine arms at thy request, and free My deadly foe through—courtesy!

Thou hast, O noisome knave, declared That out of pity ye had spared To do me hurt—see then mine head All torn and cruelly bebled, And was it thy sweet mercy pray Caused thee to pluck mine eye away From out its socket? Worse than fool Were I to hearken now ye pule And cry for mercy.

But beyond
All other injuries, my fond
And loving heart it most doth touch,
To think how thou hast dared besmutch
And slander my beloved wife,
Whom count I dearer far than life,
Or fame or goods: therefore my hate
Nor time nor season can abate."

While Isegrym in wrath thus spake, The Fox but schemed some means to make Escape from death.

The Wolf's red tongue,
Wearied and parched with speaking, hung
Outside his mouth; this Reynard saw—
With one great jerk he freed his paw,
Thrust up his head from underneath,
Seized fast the tongue betwixt his teeth
And hung thereto until the red
Bright blood streamed down; then straightway fled
All thought of Reynard, as forth rang
Isegrym's scream of anguish. Sprang
The Fox from 'neath him, and on high
Raised pæans shrill of "Victory!"



WAS OVERCOME BY THE FOX AND HOW THE FOX 'HAD THE WORSHIP' JY

A LTHOUGH to lose one eye sharp pain Had caused the Wolf, yet would he fain Have lost the second ere his tongue Had thus been bitten, for it wrung His frame with such sore agony, that Down fell he, prostrate, prone and flat, As one falls dead.

Then forward leapt
The Fox, and on his body stept,
Shrieked with delight, and shouted loud,
Seized the Wolf's legs, and through the crowd
Dragged him along for all to see,
And stack and smote him lustily.

Ah! then what wrath and grief did wring The Wolf's befrienders, and the King Besought they, tearful-eyed, to stay All further combat.

Quick yeasay
Was thereto given; forthwith the Losse
And Leopard nimbly stept across
The lists and said: "We charge ye both
To stay your hands; the King is loth
That further battle should be done,
And straight commandment gives each one
To cease the strife, for both have gained
Honour and glory, and sustained
Right well their worship. But the prize,"
263

nard victorious.

XLII. Rey- Quoth they, "O Fox, most clearly lies With thee, that King and Court award Who watched the strife."

"Whate'er our Lord

The King commands," the Fox replied; "I own for law, and give beside My heartfelt thanks to all around, By whose fair judgment I am found With humble heart I pray My friends and counsellors to say What next they judge 'tis mine to do."

Not lukewarm now were friends, or few, To honour Reynard; soon they came In tribes and troops; I will but name Some who in earliest order hap. First Grymbert Dachs and Dame Sleepcap His faithful wife; Dame Rukenawe, To whose good counsel and wise saw The Fox owed much, her hopeful sons, Bitelives and Fulrompe—wily ones— Hatenet her daughter; then the house Of Weaseldom, the Flittermouse, And twenty more, who, if it so Had happed for Fate's dark hand to go Against the Fox in open field, Much tardier then had been to yield To him their homage: thus it is Through all the world's long tale, ywis, That who by good success doth raise His head on high shall win great praise And fair renown; but if in strife A man gets worsted, then in life Small laud he finds, and nought can save His worthy deeds from Lethe's wave. Yea, some of those grasped Reynard's hand 264

Who hitherto had care to stand Aloof, but now did they appear With friendly countenance, and cheer Most sweet and pleasant, as though nought But love had crossed their inmost thought.

XLII. Reynard victorious.

What pen can write, what tongue can tell The merry feasts that now befell In Reynard's honour? Trumpets blew His fame abroad; and shawms with new And pleasant pipings, joined to song, Told how the Fox had right, and wrong Lay all with vanquished Isegrym.

Quoth Reynard: "Truly to the brim, Dear friends, my cup of joy is full, And honours lie on me as wool Bears down a sheep near shearing days." Then passed they through the praising ways In long procession towards the King, While sweet-voiced boys and maidens sing, With tuneful rhythm, songs of glee And other joyous minstrelsy. And as the revel rolled along Thus sounded somewhat of their song:

"All hail to Reynard! trumpet tongued His gallant deeds proclaim, His glory shines with golden glow Triumphant, while the Wolf alow Is cast, fulfilled of shame.

Let loud acclaiming rend the sky For Reynard's well-won victory.

"The Bear, the Cat, the Wolf, each strove The Fox's power to fall, But he in counsel, court, and field, 265 XLII. Reynard victorious.

Hath forced each one in turn to yield, Uncrowned—yet Lord of all. Then let glad pæans rend the air, His friends great Reynard's glory share.

"Sing merrily forth our Master's praise,
His name let all men bless,
What though he win by fraud and guile,
The world well loves lie, craft, and wile,
Its watchword is success!
Out-ringing peals to Heaven then fling
For Reynard, and our Lord the King."

With song and shout the royal throne They reached, where Reynard falling prone, The King exclaimed:

"I prithee stand, Dear Reynard; by thine own right hand Thou hast most worshipfully kept Thy day: a warrior more adept Ne'er hath it been my luck to see; Take full discharge, and go forth free To roam and pass whereso ye will. The matter now must rest until With counsellors and noble men The cause hath been discussed, and then When Isegrym of pain and dole Is eased, and once again made whole, My messengers shall bid you come, And I with wise men's aid will sum Up all the points, and straightway give Fair judgment how ye both may live As loving friends in full accord, And liegemen true, to serve your Lord."



XLIIJ AN ENSAMPLE AS THAT THE FOX TOLD & TO THE KING AFTER HE HAD WON THE BATTLE

N / OST noble sire and gracious king, As one athirst doth hail a spring Of clear fresh water," Reynard cried, " I hail thy words. When to abide Thy sentence first to Court I came. Some envious beasts desired my shame Who ne'er had hurt or scathe from me. Yet ne'ertheless did cruelly (As envious of my fair renown) Strive to oppress and hunt me down, Egged on by foolish men who deemed That on the Wolf thy favour beamed More brightly than it glanced on me. Dear Lord, how little subtlety These men possessed! or they had known That only by the end is shown Which men be happy.

Much are they
Like certain hounds I saw one day
Stand all aheap before a gate
Where dwelt a wealthy lord; in wait
They stood until a churl should bring
Their daily platter;—issuing
From out the kitchen came a hound
Who to his seeming good had found
Means to purloin a rib of beef.
The sharp-eyed cook espied the thief,
And running quickly with a bowl

at sore cost.

XLIII. Gain Of boiling water, cast the whole Athwart his hips; the skin and hair Were scalded off, and showed all bare The naked flesh; he nathless leapt Far out of reach and safely kept The stolen good so dearly won. His fellows saw him quickly run Forth to the meadow, holding still The rib, and then did envy fill Their foolish minds, and loud they cried: 'Well doth thy friend the cook provide For thee, in giving such a bone Garnished with plenteous meat thereon.' 'Ah! little,' quoth the thief, 'ye know The inward truth from outward show, Ye praise what lies in front, but blind Are ye to that which lurks behind. See then my injured flesh and say What profit rests with me.'

When they Beheld his sodden scalded hips, Wherefrom the hair and skin in strips Hung down, a ghastly fearsome sight, They fled, and left the unhappy wight— The envied winner of the bone— To mourn his wretched state alone.

"And so these fulsome beasts who crowd Round thee, dear Lord, and strive aloud To gain thy grace and favour; when They rise above their fellow men To place and power, forthwith they pill And rob the people; soon their fill They take like lean forhungered hounds, And for a while their praise resounds From all men's mouths, and none dare say 268

XLIII. Gain at sore cost.

One word against them, while their day Of glory lasts; nay, some will aid Their evil deeds, that they apaid May be by sharing part and lot In evil-gotten gains, yet wot I well, dear Lord, when comes the end Towards which unrighteous actions tend. Then grief and shame on them must fall. And wormwood, bitterness, and gall Shall be their portion: skin and hair Shall they be shorn of, and all bare Shall they go forth, as did that hound; That is, all those false friends they found Shall fall away from them, nor more Fawn at their feet as heretofore. Dear Lord, I earnestly beseech That thou wilt let this history teach Thee somewhat of the world's dark ways: Well wot ve that in these last days Cruel extortioners oppress, With new-made modes of wickedness, Poor helpless people, whom they get By craft entangled in their net. They're worse than that poor hound who bore The bone away by stealth; with sore Facing and bracing bear they down Poor folk in countryside and town; Freedom and privilege they sell And drive poor wights to very hell, For pelf and profit. Surely God Will lastly scourge them with the rod Of shame, and whosoe'er they be, Will deal his judgments righteously. But, Heaven be thanked! the Fox ne'er wrought In such vile wise, but ever taught His fellows to avoid the crimes

at sore cost.

XLIII. Gain Which run so rife in these ill times, That clear and pure his name might show From smutch, as fair new-fallen snow. The Fox shall ave the Fox remain— The good man's friend, the bad man's bane.

> Dear King, towards thee my heart doth burn With ardent love, nor will I turn That love from thee, whate'er betide, But to the utterest day will bide Thy faithful liegeman—otherwise, I doubt, some men have striven with lies Your Highness to persuade, but I Am true—or if I live or die."



HE King said: "Reynard, thou dost owe To me due homage—be not slow To do thy fealty, and command Shall then go forth throughout the land That thou be held in high estate As chiefest judge and magistrate. See well that ye no more misdo Or trespass, but deal honest, true, And righteous judgment all around With fearless conscience. Most profound We count thy wisdom, tact, and wit, And therefore give due heed to it. Well ponder all thy tongue hath said, Nor let thy dooming be misled

From virtue's path. 'Tis mine intent
To let our sovereign will be bent
Henceforth to work by thy advice;
And should foul jealousy entice
Some envious churl to do thee ill
In word or deeds, by Heaven, I will
Shower down such vengeance on his head,
Ere yet a second day be sped,
That he shall curse the unhappy morn
When Clotho cried "O man be born;"
Bailiff and warden of the realm,
Thy hand alone must guide the helm."

XLIV. Reynard's state glorious.

Quoth Reynard: "How can I express Dear Lord, my heartfelt thankfulness?" And all his friends and kindred said That each would answer, head by head, For Reynard's faith.

Dame Rukenawe
Exclaimed: "Dear King, should Reynard draw
His foot from strictest rectitude,
Thereafter would a deadly feud
Be ever set betwixt us twain."

Then forth spake Reynard once again And said: "A feeling doth oppress My heart of deep unworthiness Now thou so graciously hath dealt, Dear Lord, with me and mine. Ne'er felt A man more grateful than do I That thus ye let bygones go by."

Now hearken ye how Isegrym, With bleeding wounds, and sore of limb, Lay stretched all helpless on the field. At first men deemed the fight had sealed nard's state glorious.

XLIV. Rev. His fate for ave: but Ersewyn. With loving help from lupine kin (The Panther, Losse, and Bruin Bear), Raised him from off the ground with care, And made of sweet and fragrant hav A warm soft bed, whereon they lay His wounded body. Then with lint His hurts, when washed, were dressed; no stint Of surgeons, wise and learned, came To tend his health, and men of fame From far and wide gave willing aid With subtlest leechcraft. Heavy weighed His wounded head, and when his eye They did but touch, with bitter cry He waked from out his swoon, and made Such fierce ado, that well afraid His kin and friends were lest his wits Were lost for ever: but his fits Of madness passed when, drinking deep Of soothing draughts, he sank to sleep: And kindly words of comfort gave The learned masters, that though grave And deep his wounds, he would begin Ere long to mend. Dame Ersewyn With tears of joy gave hearty thanks To Heaven, and people of all ranks Rejoiced that they once more would see The Wolf all whole. Then speedily The Court broke up, and every beast Went home—for thus was closed the feast.



·XLV·HOW·THE:FOX:WITH: ·HIS FRIENDS·DEPARTED' 'NOBLY·FROM·THE:KING· ·AND WENT·TO·HIS·CASTIE ·OF·MALPERDY & & &

WHEN Reynard took his final leave
Of King and Queen, quoth they: "We grieve,
Dear Reynard, that ye hence must go
With speedy foot, but be not slow
To come and glad our hearts again."

Replied he: "Nay, then, who more fain Than I to visit you at need, With wit, or body-help to speed All things that lie within my power? Ever the Fox doth, in the hour Of stress and storm, most freely give His aid to friends—long may ye live In great estate, and when ye die, Sweet-savoured be your memory."

Then fared he forth 'mid merry rout
Of loving friends, with joyous shout
And loud triumphant songs of glee,
Till reached they Castle Malperdy,
Where he with fair and courteous speech
Said: "Dearest friends, I do beseech
Ye one and all, that if ye need
My help or counsel, ye but speed
Hither at once; ye soon shall prove
How faithful stands the Fox's love."

273

Then to his tender loving wife

T

XLV. He lives in scorn of folk censorious. He told the tale, how near his life To forfeit came, no single word Did he forego.

When now they heard
His hairbreadth 'scapes, most wondrous fain
His children were that once again,
Unscathed, their father was restored
To wealth, in honour with his Lord,
And clear of charge. At Malperdy
Henceforth he lived right jollily.

OW well I wot, that who should set Himself in Reynard's craft might get, By lies and flattery, equal praise With him; for crooked devious ways Are loved of Lords who haunt the Court. Whether they be of ghostly sort Or temporal state. The Fox hath left Behind him scholars who his heft May fit with blade and mighty wax, By threading those sly tortuous tracks That he so skilfully hath trod. But weary steps dull fools must plod Who know not well the Fox's wiles: On them the world but faintly smiles: For crafty wit it is that brings Success to men in Courts of Kings And Popes, and Emperors, and each But striveth how to best o'erreach His fellow man, by simony, Brute force, deceit, or flattery.

Within the Court one thing alone Hath power unerring to atone

For all misdeeds—bright glittering gold! Whoso within his power doth hold This talisman shall ever be Received with joyous courtesy, Alike by highborn dames and lords.

XLV. He lives in scorn of folk censorious.

Money to murder carles affords
Protection. Money bringeth shame
On purest souls. By money came
Falsehood and lies. By money love
Is bought and sold, which should above
All price be counted. Money makes
The foul seem fairest, and awakes
Men's vilest lusts.

I sorely fear,
From all I see around and hear
Of murder, cruel deeds, and theft,
And shameless vaunting of the deft
And bold-eyed way in which the law
Is set at naught, like some old saw
Arust with age, that surely God,
E'en though his wrath may seem to nod
And slumber for a while, will bring
Fierce vengeance on our misdoing.

Therefore with humble heart I pray All folk who read these words to stay From evil courses and amend While life still lasts, for soon the end Must come upon us, nor will spare This man or that, but each must bear The burden he himself hath cast Across his back.—Oh! turn ye fast Ere God's great day of grace be past.

EPILOGUE.

OW whosoever more or less hath said
About the Fox, or deeds his hand hath done,
Than what may be within this volume read,
Regard it not for sooth—the snares he spun,
And pranks he played, this story doth record,
His subtle shifts, and lastly his reward.

And he who giveth not belief at full
To all he finds set down within this book,
Him should I hold to be a man of dull
Small wit, and one who hath, alas! forsook
The true belief that every wight should hold
Concerning that which Reynard wrought of old.

Nay, some there be, who, though their eyes had seen All that which happed, would nathless doubt thereof, Yet many marvels in this world, I ween, Have come to pass and left small room for scoff. And even as scenes in mysteries and plays (Which be but tropes) oft prove in diverse ways

Example good for folk who fain would use
And follow virtue's paths, so in this tale,
The man who virtue loves, and vice eschews,
Shall find great help and wondrous good avail
In time of need, although in jest or jape
It doth from time to time its wisdom shape.

Within its page no good man hath been blamed,
Nor are its arrows sped at that or this,
But if or here or there men find them shamed,
Then let them change their way of life, ywis,
And for those folk whose footsteps have gone straight,
I pray God keep them in that fair estate.

276

SUMMA

T THOU HEREIN HAST AUGHT DISCERNED WRIT,
O READER, THAT OF GUILT CONVICTS THY HEART,
MAKE QUICK AMENDS: OR HAST THOU CONSCIENCE QUIT
OF ALL OFFENCE, GOD GRANT THOU NE'ER DEPART
FROM WISDOM'S PLEASANT PATHS; BUT SHOULDST THOU START
AT AUGHT THAT TASTE OR FINE-WROUGHT FEELING SHOCKS,
SPARE THOU THE AUTHOR; BLAME ALONE



GLOSSARIAL NOTES ON SOME PERSONS, PLACES, AND THINGS MENTIONED IN THE FOREGOING HISTORY, AND ON SOME WORDS USED BY REYNARD AND HIS FRIENDS WHICH HAVE FALLEN OUT OF OUR-DAY SPEECH.

ABRION, n.,
p. 197, l. 2.

The works of Master Abrion
No modern eyes have looked upon.
'Twould seem that wondrous paradox,
The fertile brain of Reynard Fox,
Bred him, that he in ages later
Might vex the studious commentator.

Acon, n.,
p. 76, l. 9.

Aix-la-chapelle, as Acon known
Was to our sires, but since has grown
Strange to our ears with hard short A,
And Aachen written 'tis to-day.

AKERYN, n.,
p. 195, l. 26.
The learned Master Akeryn
To us is but a shadow thin.
If e'er he wrote, his works are tost
Into the limbo of books lost.
Perhaps he, too, is a creation
Of Reynard's brain, for our vexation.

AVICENE, n.,
p. 188, l. 17.

Than the great Arab Avicene,
None wiser e'er was born, I ween.
About the year ten-twelve he wrote
The "Canon Medicinæ." Note
And fame to him were given therefor
While five long hundred years rolled o'er.

BENYM, v., p. 102, l. 33. Although this word to ancient times Belongs, yet scanty are the rhymes 279 In "im;" and so, though scholars treat Its use as past and obsolete, Wherefore should not poor rhymesters wake Its slumbers? It but means to take.

BEWIMPLE, v., A head-gear formed with many a crimple, p. 157, l. 17.

In Reynard's days was called a wimple, So, to bewimple meant to say,
To hide and cover from the day.

BONSING, n.,
p. 191, l. 21.
This word as "Boussyng" may you see
In the great Oxford N. E. D.
Caxton's turned "n" misplaced it there.
This name, in Dutch, do Polecats bear.

BORROWS, 26, Borrows were hostages or bail,
p. 246, l. 7.
Whose goods were forfeit should they fail
To bring the champions to the field,
There to abide what fate should yield.

BURGEONING, To burgeon, most men wot, I trow, ppl., p. 3, l. 8. Is but to bud, burst forth, and grow.

BYDWONGEN, This word dragged straightway from the Dutch, a., p. 116, l. 34. You'll say cannot be needed much,
For centuries have left it lonely,
Lurking in Caxton's writings only.
It means enforced, constrained, compelled,
By force kept backwards or withheld.

DACHS, n.,

passim.

A badger, Caxton calls a Dachs,

Ta'en from the Dutch; it strangely lacks
In English word-books, yet the sound
Is quite familiar of Dachs-hound.

DAYED, v.,
p. 36, l. 8.

In ancient times a man was dayed
When accusation had been made
Of crime against him; then must he
By oath and witness prove him free
Of guilt, or boldly, hand to hand,
Against his foe in combat stand
On day declared and given out
By trumpet clang and herald's shout.

DEUCE-ACE, c.n., p. 109, l. 12.

That which is likened to deuce-ace Hath in esteem the lowest place; For when a dicer makes his cast, Deuce-ace is reckoned least and last.

Eisel, n., p. 247, l. 21. For this one needs not to seek far, All the world knows 'tis vinegar.

EME, n., passim. Though Eme for uncle may be dead In southern speech, it keeps its head Above oblivion in the north; Nor hath it e'er been driven forth From poet's diction. 'Tis from "Ohm" Of Germans, or the Dutchmen's "Oom."

ERMANRIC. p. 74, l. 24.

Great Ermanric was, in the fourth Of Christian centuries, the King And ruler of the stormy North: His feast-hall heard famed Widsith sing The earliest strain of English song; Far travelled gleeman he, and guest Right welcome, when he sang the strong And glorious deeds by which long rest The King gave Northern lands, and rose Victorious o'er his Vandal foes.

FLOCKS, n., p. 133, l. 27.

The charge to "stuffe the sleve with flocks," Made by the King against the Fox, At first reads like some ancient joke Wherewith he would false Reynard poke, And hence the phrase doth owe insertion, Nigh wholemeal dragged from Caxton's version; Now fear I 'tis a mistranslation, At least, that's Logeman's explanation.

FLOYT, v., p. 257, l. 25.

If illustration you require
Of this word, turn to Chaucer's Squire.
To floyt doth mean to speak with soft,
Alluring phrase, as knaves use oft.

GELYS, n., p. 105, l. 32.

As Chaucer of "mine author Lollius" tells In Troilus, whom no man ever found, So one suspects that Master Gelys dwells Alone in Reynard's pages: through the round 281 Of names of learned priests whose works abound On penitence and penance may one pore, Yet Master Gelys founden is no more.

GRYN, **,
p. 28, l. 11.

In Psalm one-forty may you see
(The fifth verse) "they set grins for me."
But our new versioners have reft
The "r" alas! and "gins" 'tis left,
Yet "grins," a true old English word,
To mangled French should be preferred.

GRYSE, **., Gryse in old speech did grey fur mean, p. 157, l. 27. On robes of office oft-times seen.

JAPE, v., To jape was but to gibe or joke, passim. Or at one's neighbour fun to poke.

LEASINGS, 7.,
p. 66, l. 25.

He who our new-turned Bible tries
For this good word, will now find "lies,"
Psalm v., verse 6, or else "falsehood,"
Psalm iv., verse 2, where "leasing" stood.

MUSEHONT, s., Musehont for Weasel still survives
p. 191, l. 20. In the eastern counties, where their lives
Lived out the Dutchmen, driven o'er sea
By Alva's dread ferocity.

OSTROLE, n.,
p. 191, l. 32.
This cryptogamic beast all search
Eludes, and leaves us in the lurch.
To naturalists he is unknown,
And etymologists him disown;
Muller hath tracked him all he can,
Yet baffles he him and Logeman.

PALSTER, n.,
p. 107, l. 18.

A palster carried in his hand
Each pilgrim to the holy land.
Tis a Dutch word, that's why, I weet,
Tis not in Bradley nor in Skeat.
(Right well I know "weet" should be "wot"
And so it would if Skeat were Scott.)
It was a staff five feet in length,
And of good sturdiness and strength.

RATHE, adj., p. 111, l. 15. That rathe means early, each man knows Who's read of Milton's "rathe primrose." 282

REDE, v., Passim. Rede doth advice or counsel mean, Oft scouted when 'tis good, I ween.

ROOM, v., The good old phrase "to room," of late

p. 162, l. 28. Hath been supplanted by "vacate."

Shrew, n.,

passim.

Though now a shrew but means a scold
Or woman termagant, of old
'Twas said of those of either sex
Whose ill life other folk might vex.

St. Martin's Good Randle Cotgrave 'tis alone
BIRD, #.,
p. 38, l. 2. Who to the searcher maketh known
Hen Harrier as St. Martin's bird;
Vainly one seeks elsewhere the word.

SIB, n.,
p. 123, l. 9. A sib hath every man who lives,
Unless he lack all relatives.

SLONK, v., p. 131, l. 23. This outland word hath fared but badly, Finding no place in Stratmann-Bradley. The reason is not hard to follow, 'Tis Caxton's Anglo-Dutch for swallow.

SNELL, a., It scarcely needs to say that snell Means quick, for that the sense doth tell.

SPENCE, 17.,
p. 52, l. 19.
The old-time spence we now call larder,
Wherefrom, as need might be, the warder
Dis-spenced good things; some rash man thence
Might etymologize dispense.

STEAD, **., A farm in old speech was a stead, p. 211, l. 23. And to the stead-man's name oft wed.

STOUNDMELE, This looks at first a strange word verily, adv., p. 87, It means no more than momentarily. l. 16.

SWINK, v., Within this old word, "swink," doth lurk p. 24, l. 16. The meaning of our phrase, hard work 283

WENTLING, v., To wentle was to roll or tumble, p. 34, l. 33. Or awkwardly along to stumble.

Wonderly, *adj.*, p. 148, l. 21.

The learned grammar-men who live In these last days no adjective Count "wonderly," but were I taxed on The use of it, good Father Caxton Should be my panoply and shield, For thus doth he the example yield: "Thaventure of the world," quoth he, (Cap. twenty-seven) "is wonderly."

AN INDEX-SUMMARY OF PERSONS NAMED AND MATTERS TREATED OF.

Abrion of Trier, 197. Akeryn, Master, 195. Avicene, 188.

Baudelo, Abbot of, 246.
Bellyn the Ram speaks against
Reynard, 61.
Says mass for Reynard, 107.
Starts with Reynard on pil-

grimage, 110.
Agrees to carry letters to the

King, 120.
Is accused of Cuwaert's murder, 124.

Is delivered over to death, 125. Bitelives, son of Dame Rukenawe, 190.

Goes borrow for Reynard, 246. Bonsing, 191.

Bruin the Bear.

Is sent to summon Reynard to Court, 17.

Accepts Reynard's invitation to feast on honey, 22.

Is trapped by Reynard, 26.
Is bantered by Reynard, 27.

Is beaten by Lantfert, 28.

Returns to Court and complains on Reynard, 35. Accused of conspiring to be-

come King, 75.

Bruin the Bear—continued.

Arrested as a traitor, IoI.

Has a scrip cut from his back,
IOI.

Goes borrow for Isegrym, 246.

Chanticlere.

His accusation of Reynard, 11. Comb, wonders of the, 200. Coppen, daughter of Chanticlere.

Killed by Reynard, 15.

Corbant the Rook complains against Reynard, 130.

Reynard's explanation, 166.
Courtoys the Hound complains
on Reynard, 5.

on Reynard, 5.
Crane and Wolf, Fable of, 215.
Cuwaert the Hare as Reynard's scholar, 6.

Called by Reynard as witness concerning Krekynpit, 93.
Is to guide the King thither,

97. Accompanies Reynard to Mal-

perdy, 110. Slain by Reynard, 113.

Eelmare, Isegrym's monastery, 52.
Empty-Belly son of Isegrym

Empty-Belly, son of Isegrym, 185.

Ermelyne, Reynard's wife.
Reynard bids her adieu, 49.
Hears of the conspiracy from
Sleepcap, 76.
Objects to leave Malperdy, 115.
Believes in Reynard's pilgrim-

age, 116. Ermanric, King, his treasure store. 74.

store, 74. His crown, 92.

Ersewyn complains how Reynard got her into a well, 234.

Frogs and Stork, Fable of, 77. Fulrompe, son of Dame Rukenawe, 190.

Fyrapeel the Leopard defends the Queen, 135.

Gelys, Master, 105.
Grymbert the Dachs.
His defence of Reynard, 7.
Is sent to summon Reynard, 47.
Hears Reynard's confession, 51.
Shrives him, 55.
Called as witness by Reynard, 74.
Goes to warn Reynard of his danger, 138.
Sups with Reynard, 144.
Praises his family, 145.
Hears Reynard's second confession, 149.
Goes borrow for Reynard, 246.

Hatenet, daughter of Dame Rukenawe, 191. Horse and Hart, Fable of, 210. Hound and Ass, Fable of, 211. Hound and bone, Fable of, 267. Hulsterlo, 90. Isegrym the Wolf. Complains on Reynard, 4. Cheats Reynard of a plaice, 8. Is made a monk by Reynard. Has his feet tied to the bellrope, 52. Is left for dead at Vermedos, Is cajoled by Reynard at a henroost, 54. Is willing to hang Reynard, 65. Accused of a conspiracy, 75. against Reynard Complains again, 100. Is arrested, 101. Has his shoes plucked off, 103. Is restored to the King's favour. 125. His adventure with the mare and foal, 151. How badly he shared the swine, Disbelieves Reynard's tale of the jewels, 228. Tells of Reynard's ill-treatment of his wife, 229. His adventure with the Mercatte, 241. Challenges Reynard to combat,

Jewels, Story of the, 194. Julock, the priest's wife, 43.

Key-word to the treasure store, 90. Krekynpit, 90.

Lantfert the carpenter beats Bruin, 28. Lapreel Coney complains against Reynard, 128. Reynard's contradiction, 165.

286

Martin the Ape, his counsel to Reynard, 164. Mercatte, Story of the, 236. Mirror, The wonders of the, 205. Musehont, 191.

Never-Full, son of Isegrym, 185.

Nobel the King.

Holds his Court, 1.

His anger against Reynard for the murder of Coppen, 16.

His wrath for Bruin's ill-usage, 35.

Sends Tubert to Perpord, 26.

Sends Tybert to Reynard, 36. His wrath for Tybert's ill-treatment, 45.

His answer to Reynard's excuse, 60.

Gives ear to Reynard's confession, 68.

Seized with cupidity of the treasure, 71.

Doubts Reynard's tale, 86. Gives ear to the Queen's prayer, 86.

Pardons Reynard, 87.
Wills Reynard to come and point out the treasure, having

doubts thereof, 93.

Asks pardon of Reynard for his doubts, 95.

Declares Reynard to be reinstated in his favour, 98.

His wrath at Cuwaert's murder, 123.

Holds a great festival, 126. His wrath at the injuries to Lapreel and Sharpbecke, 132. Accuses the Queen of mislead-

Reproaches Reynard with his misdeeds, 161.

Gives Reynard leave to speak again, 193.

Nobel the King—continued.

His astonishment at the shorn
Fox, 250.

Restores Reynard to all his
honours, 270.

Olwey, Dame, the Ram's wife, 61. Ostrole, 191.

Panther speaks against Reynard, 6.
Panthera, 200.
Paris, Judgment of, 202.
Priest, The.
Beats Bruin, 30.
His wife in the river, 31.
His barn, 40.
Is bitten by Tybert, 43.
His larder robbed by Isegrym, 52.

Queen accepts Reynard's tale, and pleads for him, 71. Speaks to the King in his wrath, 134.

Reynard the Fox. Comes not to Court, 3. Complained on by Isegrym, 4. His treatment of Cuwaert, 6. His reformation asserted by Grymbert, 7. His deception of Chanticlere, Is summoned to Court, 17. Invites Bruin to eat honey, 22. Traps Bruin in a cleft tree, 26. His song to the Bear, 26. The Cat's embassy to him, 36. He invites Tybert to a feast of mice, 40. Gets him into a trap, 42. Banters Dame Julock, 44. Receives Grymbert, 47.

Reynard the Fox—continued. Starts with him for the Court. Tells how he made Isegrym a monk, 52. How he tied Isegrym's feet to the bell-rope, 52. How he cajoled Isegrym at Vermedos, 52. Gets Isegrym beaten at the hen-roost, 54. The penance assigned to him by Grymbert, 55. How he hankered after the poultry of the black nuns, 56. He comes to Court, 58. He speaks before the King, 59. Is judged guilty, 62. Is led to the gallows, 63. Asks a boon of the King, 67. Confesses openly his evil life, 68. His partnership with Isegrym, Declares his knowledge of a great treasure, 70. Reveals a plot laid by his father to murder the King, 71. How he discovered his father's treasure-store, 80. How his father hanged himself, 84. Presents the King with a straw as earnest of the treasure, 89. Tells of the hiding-place of the treasure, 90. Gives the key-word to the treasure, 90. Excuses himself from going to Krekynpit, 95. Declares himself under the Church's ban, 95. Must go to Rome for absolution, 96.

Reynard the Fox—continued. Restored to the King's favour, Demands a piece of Bruin's skin for a scrip, 101. Asks for the Wolves shoes, 102. Banters Ersewyn, 104. Prepares for his pilgrimage, 105. Asks Bellyn and Cuwaert to journey with him, 110. Kills and eats Cuwaert, 113. Relates to Ermelyne how he tricked the King, 113. Proposes to migrate, 114. Is tickled at Ermelyne's belief in his pilgrimage, 116. Attacks Lapreel the Coney, 129. Pretends to be dead, 130. Eats Sharpbecke, 131. Is warned by Grymbert, 138. Makes light of the warning, 141. Feasts Grymbert, 144. Enlarges on his sons' abilities, 144. Sings a song, 145. Starts again for Court, 149. Confesses again to Grymbert, His trick with the Mare and Isegrym, 151. Harangues the King again, Is threatened by the King, 180. His judgment between the man and serpent, 181. His kith and kin, 191.

Affects surprise at Cuwaert's

Complains of the perfidy of

Tells of the lost jewels, 196.

death, 194.

Tybert, 213.

Reynard the Fox-continued. His father as physician to the King, 219. How he carved for the King, How he taught Ersewyn to fish, 229. How he got her into a well, 234. His tale of the Mercatte, 236. Is challenged by Isegrym, 244. Fights with Isegrym, 252. His victory and triumph, 262. Returns to Malperdy, 274. Reynkyn, Reynard's eldest son, 50. His precocious cleverness, 144. Ring, The, and its wonders, 196. Rukenawe, wife of Martin the Ape, 170. Defends Reynard, 176. Counsels and shaves him for the combat, 247.

St. Martin's Bird, 38.
Serpent and Man, Fable of, 181.
Sharpbecke killed by Reynard,
131.
Sleepcap, Grymbert's wife, 76.
Symonet, Father, 94.

Tybert the Cat.

Answers Courtoys, 5.

His embassy to Reynard, 36.
Is invited to the Priest's barn, 40.
Is caught in a gryn, 42.
Returns to Court nigh dead, 45.
His terror when Reynard is acquitted, 100.
His perfidy towards Reynard, 213.
Goes borrow for Isegrym, 245.
Tyselyn the Raven, 99.
His judgment between the man and serpent, 187.



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